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Managing Academic and Personal Life in Graduate Studies:  
An Interactive Qualitative Analysis of Graduate Student Persistence and Transformation

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Managing Academic and Personal Life in Graduate Studies:  
An Interactive Qualitative Analysis of Graduate Student Persistence and Transformation

by

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**Dissertation**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of  
The University of Texas at Austin  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of  
**Doctor of Philosophy**

The University of Texas at Austin  
August 2011

## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to my loving and supportive family whose commitment has made my entire journey through my doctorate possible. I am humbled by my husband, Robert A. Helmer, who has been by my side every moment of the way from city to city, moment to moment, through every learning and transformational growth experience. This dissertation is also dedicated to my parents, Dr. David A. Waugh and Dr. Annette Hartenstein, whose encouragement and positive works remind me that the pathway to enlightenment is a lifelong process. Their inspiration, generosity, and patience continue to help me reach my goals and dreams. My family reminds me of my purpose on this planet: to inspire future leaders, promote a global vision, and make possible the American Dream – that all Americans rich or poor can go as far in life as their talents and persistence will take them. I thank them all and respect their wisdom.

## **Acknowledgements**

This study demonstrates that the primary driver of graduate student success is faculty. This is no less true in my life and throughout my doctoral experience. My committee not only served as relentless, passionate educational leaders, but they reminded me that education is a symbiotic partnership where I must also give 100%. They did not command me or tell me where to go or what to do, but compassionately helped me find my own way so that I could leave their nest with my own immutable wings. My committee supported and guided me with patience, particularly when I was unclear of the specific thesis direction. Each member of my committee is a hero in their own right, but I chose them because they are my personal heroes.

Norvell Northcutt and Danny McCoy served as the source for my dissertation's framework and the seed for future research I plan to perform over the rest of my career. I especially thank my chair, Dr. John E. Roueche, whose legacy of community college leadership was the inspiration for me entering the University of Texas at Austin's Community College Leadership Program (CCLP). Despite his incredible speaking, teaching, advising, and writing schedule, he always found time to offer his honest wisdom. A huge thank you is also extended to Dr. Kay McClenney, Dr. Maxwell McCombs, Dr. Richard Reddick, and Dr. Jess Butler for their insight, experience, and support. My dissertation would not have been possible without Dr. Northcutt who was always available, incredibly patient, and incessantly compassionate while I waded through my search for clarity. The generosity of my committee for their time and commitment will never be forgotten as I go on to live my destiny in service to students everywhere.

My husband, Robert A. Helmer, is the most loving, loyal, and generous partner I could ever imagine having by my side. There was never a time when he

stepped out to question the enormity of doing it all in the face of geographic, financial, and personal obstacles. In fact, he just said, “Let’s go!” My gratitude for his extraordinary, loving commitment can never be overestimated. Thick and thin, he was there reminding me each day that we had “fifty more years” together and decades of support to future generations of students.

My parents are the source of wisdom, knowledge, and generosity. Their leadership in education, economics, and international training has inspired thousands. Their ceaseless quest to learn drives me to work harder, see farther, and incessantly support education for all who want to learn. They light the flame that brilliantly glows ahead of me as I take each step. They remind me that life is an adventure and that I should enjoy and savor every moment.

The UT Austin CCLP Block 65 was instrumental in inspiring me to pursue this topic. They challenged me each step of the way to ask tough questions about what it means to be a team player, leader, partner, and graduate student. They pushed me to work harder. They served as leaders offering wisdom while helping me to understand that greatness comes in all forms. Their differences taught me that diversity is powerful and effective in teaching lessons we must master if we are to enter the complex world ahead. No two individuals are the same, but each of us face our own battles and must rise above the past to move on to the future. My Block 65 cohort served as an amazing community of scholars. Each, in his or her own way, motivated me and, for that, I am truly blessed and thankful.

This dissertation was created with the support of Chenoa Robbins who inspires me every day with her potential, brilliance, talent, wisdom, and commitment to learning. She is the possibility, the hope, and the reason educators must reach out, inspire, and work harder to bridge the gaps that separate those who are challenged, but capable, to

graduate and go on to achieve their full potential. She reveals to me that we, in education, have a long way to go to adapt to our changing society. Her thoughtful reading and re-reading of my work kept me on track throughout my doctoral studies and dissertation.

A bridge to the future is only as strong as the connective ties that hold the cables together along the way. Beverly Hurbace and Ruth Thompson were my ties. They served as the source of much needed smiles throughout my journey. They brought joy into my world every day I entered the CCLP office and for that I am forever grateful. They extended a safe passage for me and they reminded me that I could and would finish.

Finally, I want to thank those who participated in this study for their willingness to share their experiences. Through their eyes, I was able to better understand a wider vision of the graduate experience as they navigated the pathway toward their own career and life goals.

## ABSTRACT

# **Managing Academic and Personal Life in Graduate Studies: An Interactive Qualitative Analysis of Graduate Student Persistence and Transformation**

by  
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The University of Texas at Austin, 2011

Supervisor: John E. Roueche

This study examines the impact of academic and personal life on graduate student persistence and transformation. Of particular interest are the relationships, emotions, and life management skills required throughout the graduate experience and how socialization, emotional intelligence, and advising aid students through their academic program. With an average of seven to eight years required to complete a doctoral program, life happens. Students enter and leave relationships, children are born, family members have emergencies, health issues arise, and emotional growth takes place. Therefore, students transform not only academically, but in many ways. These are intertwined as evidenced by the data-derived system representation. The importance of understanding the interconnected links in graduate experience spans academic, social, economic, and societal spheres.

Each year hundreds of thousands of students enter graduate school. However, for doctoral students, there is an enormous gap between acceptance and completion. After

seven years, approximately 50 percent complete their program and after ten years the rate climbs to only 57 percent (Council of Graduate Schools, 2010). This study offers a systemic representation and a four-stage model of graduate student development, incorporating student-identified factors: Faculty Impact, Life Management, Relationships, Playing the Game, Growth/Transformation, Emotions, and Reward/Purpose.

***Stage I: Orientation and Socialization***

***Stage II: Adjustment and Transition***

***Stage III: Navigation and Transformation***

***Stage IV: Completion and Advancement***

The results, presented as a systems-based model, along with analysis, may be used to support faculty, advisors, and administrators in creating better advising, orientation, evaluation, and support systems. Departmental policies may be improved to identify at-risk students, provide mentorship opportunities, or obtain continual feedback to understand the underlying factors that may stop students from progressing. This research might also help identify students during the application/admission process.

The methodological framework used to create the system produced in this study is Interactive Qualitative Analysis (Northcutt & McCoy, 2004), a methodology that provides the quantitative rigor of algorithmically generated data analysis, combined with the qualitative descriptiveness of interviews, in order to provide insights into the drivers of graduate school persistence. This methodology uses a systematic, protocol-driven research procedure to construct a unified, descriptive diagram to illustrate the phenomenon.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	VII
LIST OF FIGURES .....	XII
LIST OF GRAPHS .....	XV
LIST OF TABLES.....	XVI
CHAPTER 1 .....	1
INTRODUCTION .....	1
THE APPLICATION AND DECISION PROCESS .....	1
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.....	7
PURPOSE OF THE STUDY .....	8
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY .....	10
RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	11
SYSTEMS THEORY AND IQA.....	11
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	14
CHAPTER 2-LITERATURE REVIEW.....	15
EDUCATIONAL CRISIS.....	15
STUDENT ENROLLMENT AND GRADUATION DATA .....	20
NEED FOR EDUCATIONAL ADVANCEMENT .....	22
RESEARCH ON GRADUATE EDUCATION .....	25
THE EFFECT OF MARRIAGE ON GRADUATE STUDENT SUCCESS .....	25
THE GRADUATE EXPERIENCE.....	27
WHAT ELEMENTS MAKE UP THE GRADUATE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE? .....	28
<i>Faculty Impact</i> .....	28
<i>Relationships</i> .....	30
<i>Life Management</i> .....	31
<i>Playing the Game</i> .....	32
<i>Growth and Transformation</i> .....	34
<i>Reward and Purpose</i> .....	35
<i>Emotions</i> .....	36
<i>Career advancement</i> .....	37
HOW DO THESE ELEMENTS FIT TOGETHER AND DRIVE ONE ANOTHER? .....	38
INSTITUTIONAL AND FACULTY DRIVERS OF GRADUATE STUDENT SUCCESS.....	39
SOCIALIZATION .....	40
COHORT AND NON-COHORT PROGRAMS .....	42
MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES IN GRADUATE SCHOOL SUCCESS .....	44
HISTORY OF INTELLIGENCE STUDY .....	46
<i>Emotional intelligence</i> .....	49
APPLICANT SELECTION .....	52
<i>Identifying Risk Factors</i> .....	53
<i>Situational Judgment Theory</i> .....	54
AGENDA SETTING.....	55
<i>National Call to Action</i> .....	56
<i>Agenda-Setting History</i> .....	56
<i>Core Assumptions</i> .....	57
<i>Higher Education Funding and the Agenda</i> .....	59
<i>Complex Problems</i> .....	60
<i>Need For Orientation</i> .....	62

THE THESIS OR DISSERTATION AS A CALL TO ACTION .....	63
SUMMARY .....	64
<b>CHAPTER 3-METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>66</b>
INTRODUCTION .....	66
<i>The Four Phases of IQA</i> .....	68
<i>Research Purpose</i> .....	69
INTERACTIVE QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS (IQA).....	69
<i>What is IQA?</i> .....	69
THEORETICAL BASIS .....	70
<i>Grounded Theory</i> .....	70
<i>Total Quality Management</i> .....	70
THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	73
POPULATION OF THE STUDY .....	74
THE SAMPLE.....	75
RESEARCH PROCEDURE.....	77
<i>Introduction</i> .....	77
<i>The Four Phases of IQA</i> .....	77
<i>Comparison System</i> .....	79
<i>Individual Participant Comparisons</i> .....	79
<i>Overview of the Research Design</i> .....	80
<i>Focus Group Process (Axial Coding)</i> .....	81
<i>Individual Interviews</i> .....	84
<i>Northcutt &amp; McCoy, 2004</i> .....	85
INTERVIEW ANALYSIS .....	86
THE GRADUATE EXPERIENCE .....	86
<i>Theoretical Coding</i> .....	88
<i>Validity and Reliability</i> .....	95
<i>Limitations</i> .....	96
<b>CHAPTER 4-IN THE STUDENT’S WORDS: RESULTS OF THE STUDY .....</b>	<b>97</b>
GROUP REALITY: SYSTEM ELEMENTS-COMPOSITE AFFINITY DESCRIPTIONS.....	97
FACULTY IMPACT .....	98
LIFE MANAGEMENT .....	122
RELATIONSHIPS .....	173
RELATIONSHIPS .....	173
PLAYING THE GAME .....	224
GROWTH AND TRANSFORMATION .....	242
REWARD/PURPOSE .....	264
EMOTIONS .....	279
CAREER ADVANCEMENT .....	327
SYSTEM INFLUENCE DIAGRAM (SID) .....	340
COMPOSITE THEORETICAL DESCRIPTIONS.....	341
<i>Faculty Impact Influences Life Management</i> .....	342
<i>Faculty Impact Influences Relationships</i> .....	344
<i>Faculty Impact Influences Playing the Game</i> .....	347
<i>Faculty Impact Influences Growth/Transformation</i> .....	351
<i>Faculty Impact Influences Reward/Purpose</i> .....	354
<i>Faculty Impact Influences Emotions</i> .....	358
<i>Faculty Impact Influences Career Advancement</i> .....	362
<i>Life Management Influences Relationships</i> .....	367

<i>Life Management Influences Playing the Game</i> .....	371
<i>Life Management Influences Growth/Transformation</i> .....	373
<i>Life Management Influences Reward/Purpose</i> .....	375
<i>Life Management Influences Emotions</i> .....	377
<i>Life Management Influences Career Advancement</i> .....	379
<i>Relationships Influence Playing the Game</i> .....	383
<i>Relationships Influence Growth/Transformation</i> .....	386
<i>Relationships Influence Reward/Purpose</i> .....	389
<i>Relationships Influence Emotions</i> .....	392
<i>Relationships Influence Career Advancement</i> .....	396
<i>Playing the Game Influences Growth/Transformation</i> .....	401
<i>Playing the Game Influences Reward/Purpose</i> .....	404
<i>Playing the Game Influences Emotions</i> .....	406
<i>Playing the Game Influences Career Advancement</i> .....	409
<i>Growth/Transformation Influences Reward/Purpose</i> .....	415
<i>Growth/Transformation Influences Emotions</i> .....	417
<i>Growth/Transformation Influences Career Advancement</i> .....	419
<i>Reward/Purpose Influences Emotions</i> .....	422
<i>Reward/Purpose Influences Career Advancement</i> .....	425
<i>Emotions Influence Career Advancement</i> .....	428
THE COMPOSITE INTERVIEW UNCLUTTERED SID .....	431
<i>Pareto Reconciled SID</i> .....	432
<i>Career Advancement Influences... Reward/Purpose</i> .....	433
<i>Reward/Purpose Influences... Playing the Game</i> .....	434
<i>Playing the Game Influences... Life Management</i> .....	435
<i>Relationships Influences... Faculty Impact</i> .....	437
CHAPTER 5-CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	440
OVERVIEW .....	440
RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	442
THE SYSTEM INFLUENCED DIAGRAM (SID) .....	444
FOUR STAGE, SYSTEMS-BASED MODEL OF GRADUATE STUDENT TRANSFORMATION .....	446
THE GRADUATE EXPERIENCE FEEDBACK LOOP #1 .....	450
FACULTY IMPACT – LIFE MANAGEMENT – RELATIONSHIPS .....	450
<i>Faculty Impact</i> .....	450
THE GRADUATE EXPERIENCE FEEDBACK LOOP #1 .....	464
STAGE I – ORIENTATION AND SOCIALIZATION .....	464
THE GRADUATE EXPERIENCE FEEDBACK LOOP #2 .....	470
PLAYING THE GAME – LIFE MANAGEMENT – RELATIONSHIPS .....	470
<i>Stage II – Adjustment and Transition</i> .....	474
<i>Stage III – Navigation and Transformation</i> .....	488
<i>Stage IV – Completion and Advancement</i> .....	502
TEN FUTURE STUDIES TO CONSIDER .....	520
TEN FINAL THOUGHTS .....	522
CONCLUSION .....	526
APPENDIX .....	530
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	558
VITA .....	575

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Systems Influenced Diagram of Faculty Impact Driving All Other Affinities.....	13
Figure 2.1: The Graduate Experience Original System.....	28
Figure 2.2: Gatekeepers Plus Influential Media.....	58
Figure 3.1: IQA Research Design.....	72
Figure 3.2: Samples of System Diagrams.....	74
Figure 3.3: The Graduate Experience.....	79
Figure 3.4: Focus Group Cards Sorted By Affinities.....	82
Figure 3.5: Sample Affinity Relationship Table (ART).....	83
Figure 3.6: Focus Group Warm-Up Exercise.....	85
Figure 3.7: The Graduate Experience Interview Protocol.....	86
Figure 3.8: Theoretical Interview Process.....	89
Figure 3.9: Sample Cluttered SID.....	92
Figure 3.10: Sample Uncluttered SID.....	93
Figure 3.11: Northcutt & McCoy Interpretations & Implications.....	94
Figure 4.1: Systems Influenced Diagram – <i>Faculty Impact</i> Influences.....	341
Figure 4.2: Systems Influenced Diagram – <i>Life Management</i> Influences.....	367
Figure 4.3: Systems Influenced Diagram – <i>Relationships</i> Influence.....	383
Figure 4.4: Systems Influenced Diagram – <i>Playing the Game</i> Influences.....	401
Figure 4.5: Systems Influenced Diagram – <i>Growth/Transformation</i> Influences.....	414
Figure 4.6: Systems Influenced Diagram – <i>Reward/Purpose</i> Influences.....	422

Figure 4.7: Systems Influenced Diagram – <i>Emotions Influence</i> .....	428
Figure 4.8: Systems Influenced Diagram – <i>The Graduate Experience Uncluttered SID</i> .....	432
Figure 4.9: Systems Influenced Diagram – <i>The Graduate Experience Pareto Reconciled SID</i> .....	432
Figure 4.10: Systems Influenced Diagram – <i>The Graduate Experience Using Student Data in this Study</i> .....	439
Figure 5.1: Systems Influenced Diagram – <i>The Graduate Experience Using Student Data in this Study</i> .....	443
Figure 5.2: Systems Influenced Diagram for the Graduate Experience with the Four Stages.....	447
Figure 5.3: Systems Influenced Diagram of the Graduate Experience Highlighting Faculty Impact.....	450
Figure 5.4: Systems Influenced Diagram of the Graduate Experience Highlighting Life Management.....	456
Figure 5.5: Systems Influenced Diagram of the Graduate Experience Highlighting Relationships.....	460
Figure 5.6: Stage I – Orientation and Socialization.....	463
Figure 5.7: Stage I Feedback Loop.....	464
Figure 5.8: Systems Influenced Diagram of the Graduate Experience Highlighting Playing the Game.....	470
Figure 5.9: Stage I – Orientation and Socialization.....	473

Figure 5.10: Stage II Feedback Loop.....	474
Figure 5.11: Systems Influenced Diagram of the Graduate Experience Highlighting Growth and Transformation.....	483
Figure 5.12 Systems Influenced Diagram of the Graduate Experience Highlighting Reward and Purpose.....	486
Figure 5.13: Stage III – Navigation and Transformation.....	488
Figure 5.14: Stage III Feedback Loop.....	489
Figure 5.15: Systems Influenced Diagram of the Graduate Experience Highlighting Emotions.....	494
Figure 5.16: Systems Influenced Diagram of the Graduate Experience Highlighting Career Advancement.....	499
Figure 5.17: Stage IV – Completion and Advancement.....	501
Figure 5.18: Stage IV Feedback Loops.....	503
Figure 5.19: Systems Influence Diagram – Reward/Purpose Outward Arrows.....	510
Figure 5.20: Systems Influence Diagram – Reward/Purpose Inward Arrows.....	511
Figure 5.21: Comparison of the Graduate Experience System to Susan Gardner’s Phase I, II, and III or Identity Development.....	514

LIST OF GRAPHS

Graph 2.1: Doctoral Completion Rate by Field and Number of Years.....17

Graph 2.2: Education Pays.....24

Graph 2.3: Average Salaries by Degree.....24

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1. Educational Attainment of the Population 18 Years and Over, by Age, Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin: 2009.....	21
Table 2.2: Summary Statistics by Gender and Marital Status.....	27
Table 3.1: Sample Interview Axial Code Table.....	87
Table 3.2: Sample Interview Theoretical Code Table.....	88
Table 3.3: Sample Combined Interview Theoretical Code Frequency Table.....	90
Table 3.4: Sample Tabular IRD.....	91
Table 5.1: Stage by Stage Table with Associated Feedback Loops.....	448
Table 5.2: Table of Affinities and Subaffinities.....	449



## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

Graduate school can be a magical quest to pursue original research, invigorate a life with greater knowledge, or achieve a personal goal to obtain a graduate degree. Yet, each year hundreds of thousands of students enter graduate school and, in doctoral programs, just over half complete their degree. In a survey conducted by the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) and the Graduate Record Examinations Board (GRE), for students beginning in fall 2009, approximately 1.7 million applications were submitted to graduate programs, 45 percent were accepted, and 463,000 enrolled for the first time in graduate certificate, education specialist, master's, or doctoral programs in the 699 out of 806 targeted universities (Bell, 2010). Yet, when it comes to completion, there is an enormous gap. Data presented in the Council of Graduate Schools Ph.D. Completion Project comprising 41,017 students at 24 institutions showed that 57 percent complete their program within a decade (CGS, 2008a). While this is a subset of all graduate students, the data points to a significant chasm between entering students and completion.

### The Application and Decision Process

Engaging in and committing oneself to the graduate school application and acceptance process is a major milestone. Finding the right school requires research into cost, accreditation, culture, financial assistance, supportive services, faculty research,

academic climate, institutional requirements, course work, time-to-degree, outside seminar presentations, and additional obligations. Although students enter with varying levels of certainty regarding their ultimate goal, they must be willing to make a long term commitment and be confident in their decision. Time is one variable that must be considered. Graduate programs take varying amounts of time, from one-year intensive masters or certificate programs, to doctoral programs with students who are still enrolled ten years later. While students are weighing their decision to commit, they must consider the impact of the many variables that will contribute to or limit their success. Ultimately, with personal and family life changes required in order to undertake graduate school, students must believe that they are a good match for that specific institution.

Similarly, from the university perspective, admissions officers and faculty must feel that the candidate is a good fit. Since they are making a significant investment in time and money in their candidates, they must determine whether they perceive that the student possesses the requisite attributes, commitment, and stick-to-itiveness. Thus, the student and the university share responsibility for ensuring due diligence in this process.

For students, embarking upon the ‘yellow brick road’ of graduate school requires a personal commitment to continue along an academic pathway and add a new role in a current set of life choices. For those who entered the workforce after college, this means journeying back to an academic life that may have begun many years before, sometimes even decades. Whether the student begins graduate school upon obtaining an undergraduate degree or after years in the workforce, this step reflects a decision to delve further into a chosen area of specialization. Unlike undergraduates, graduate students

immerse themselves in a focused area in order to both better understand current research and add to the field's body of knowledge. While the vision of future success, personal satisfaction, quest for deeper understanding, and career advancement is alluring, the pursuit takes much more than clicking one's heels together and landing the perfect position.

While potential graduate students may be consciously aware that graduate school can make a difference in personal growth and career advancement, years often pass by before some actually complete an application to graduate school despite the burning ember that kindles the internal desire. At some point, the activation energy is high enough to drive the individual to move forward with this goal. The catalyst might be increased job prospects, a promotion offer, family encouragement, child care availability, or job loss. For those who are parents, there may be a strong desire to provide greater opportunities for the family. Whatever the motivation, when the commitment is made, sometimes so many years have passed by that questions arise as to whether they are academically up for the task. Often re-entrants into university life have not taken a mathematics class or written essays in years. The idea of taking a standardized test is often so daunting and unimaginable, that a seemingly insurmountable barrier stands in the way.

Financial, family, and work responsibilities sometimes lead individuals to ask themselves, "When will the stars align and hurdles be overcome so that I can return to obtain my graduate degree?" As a mother or father embraces their children and encourages them to realize higher educational goals, helps them with their homework, or

smiles when they learn something new, they often translate that inspiration into their own anticipation of further academic pursuit. Prioritizing family and personal commitments, many people wait until the right time when they can balance the life choices, health complications, and career opportunities that have taken precedence along the way. When the time is appropriate, the fears of stepping out of a comfort zone, ominous entrance exams, and uncertainty from being out of school for a long period of time are overcome. A path clears and those who aspire to pursue graduate school blaze a trail to accomplish their goal. Their sense of purpose and quest to learn, combined with perceived life and family benefits, make the application, admission, and graduate school commitment worth the effort.

Graduate school is not the right decision for everyone, but for those who choose this avenue, this pursuit can offer discovery, hope, and reinvigoration. Not only is academic discovery fascinating and exhilarating, but self-discovery can be just as powerful and motivating – maybe even more so! Hope is a less tangible concept, but for graduate students, graduate school means the chance for a wider array of life choices, a better future for their family, and new career options. Hope leads to possibility, optimism, and a renewed chance to swim in a sparkling mountain stream of energized, refreshing rejuvenation. The effects of swimming in the alluring waters of graduate school not only benefit the individual who attends the program, but can also have a positive effect on spouses and children who also become inspired to learn and generate new ideas. Graduate school is much more rigorous in practice, but the magical enticement is lustrous when viewed from outside the academy.

Attending graduate school often requires a change in family dynamics, home environment, and employment. Some may be anticipated, like moving, driving long distances, or upgrading/purchasing computer hardware or software, not to mention the financial burden. Employers may or may not be willing to offer a leave of absence, a sabbatical, or to simply work around school schedules. This leaves the graduate student to find work on or near the campus that may require considerable time or merely secure other ways to meet their financial obligations - or give up the idea of graduate school altogether. For those who obtain a grant, graduate research position, or work as teaching assistant, this may be preferable, but for others, financing school and the associated time required can be difficult.

Elements of the academy and its processes are not always intuitive or predictable. The rules, responsibilities, and hidden requirements vary from university to university and even from college to college under the same umbrella (Margolis & Romero, 1998). There are often gatekeepers, impediments, and implicit tasks along the way. Relationship-building is a more significant part of the process than most students realize before they try to enter a gate for which they have no key. In order to overcome these challenges, students must develop self-motivated dedication as well as outside sources of empowerment from advisors, family, and personal relationships in order to advance life goals. While the first hurdle is made in the decision to apply and commitment to attend, staying in graduate school and obtaining the degree are quite a different story.

After acceptance, students begin to traverse the system, skipping across yellow bricks through a set of generally anticipated processes that include orientation,

counseling, registration, and course selection. Headed in the right direction, students begin. Soon afterward, they realize that courses require more reading than they imagined and that a full-time graduate load includes considerable multitasking, particularly if they are also working as a teaching assistant, research apprentice, graduate fellow, or in some other employment inside or outside of the academy. Course completion not only means attending class, finishing projects, and writing papers, but often includes collaborative activities with other members of a cohort or team. Independent-minded, task-oriented individuals or those who have not traditionally worked in groups may not have cultivated the necessary skills and must develop the facility to delegate tasks, share information, and manage responsibilities with fellow graduate students. Teammates, cohort members, or those immersed in the same field of study may be highly competitive and not particularly cooperative. They may interact in such a way that they exclaim that their way is the only way. Thus, at times, project completion does not always go as planned and may not even go at all.

Family and personal relationships can provide balance and solace on long days of seminars, group projects, or laboratory research, but also include outside responsibilities that require time and attention. When the graduate student has children, time management is an oversimplification of the complexity of responsibilities that cannot be ‘managed’ or anticipated. Yet, children come first when they are sick, hurt, or in some type of trouble. Thus, decision making with regards to academic activities and personal commitments demand significant flexibility. Scholarships, grants, student aid, and employer tuition reimbursement plans can greatly influence the family’s ability to handle financial

obligations. Working together with spouses/partners and children, sharing successes and setbacks is all part of the growth process and challenges along the pathway, but this also requires the support from advisors, faculty, and the university, which does not always exist.

Applying to graduate school and getting started marks the beginning of the graduate school experience. The anticipation of positive outcomes gives a student the sense that they are taking charge of their life circumstances and fulfillment of personal goals (Lovitts, 2001). Yet, the duration of time between the first day of class and the waning of this euphoria is often very short and the reality of the transition to the rigors of academic life and socialization can be intimidating (Gardner, 2009; Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson, 2006; Lovitts, 2001). Soon, the reality of balancing work, life, family, and classes sometimes leads graduate students to question, “Is this really worth the effort, time, strain, and sacrifice?”

### Statement of the Problem

Although it is commonly believed that undergraduate grade point average, admissions test scores, and the rank of a student’s undergraduate institution are the primary factors in predicting success in graduate school, this may not be the case. Many factors or affinities are integral to graduate school entrance and completion. As students progress through school, faculty, relationships, life management, playing the game, growth/transformation, emotions, reward/purpose, and career advancement are integral elements in the graduate experience(Northcutt & McCoy, 2004).

This dissertation considers the graduate student experience from a systemic perspective and specifically addresses how the elements of the system, feedback loops, and drivers lead to goal attainment. By understanding the factors that contribute to student success and the pitfalls that may slow down or prevent program completion, advisors, faculty members, and administrators may be better equipped to identify problems and support students along their journey.

### Purpose of the Study

In order to foster greater collaboration and support for graduate students in accomplishing their educational objective, it is important to understand the driving factors that move a student through the system of graduate school and on to their goals. Faculty, advisors, and administrators can use the knowledge from this study to provide the support in targeted areas to motivate students, improve programs, and support continued research. Graduate schools can use this information to understand the key elements of the system that support and limit their success.

Advising, orientation, evaluation, and support systems may be enhanced by understanding their interaction with students as they enter and move through their graduate program. Graduate programs could use this information to develop stronger counseling and advising protocols. Understanding the graduate experience could also help create more thorough, productive, and comprehensive student orientations. Departmental policies may be improved to identify at-risk students, provide mentorship opportunities, or obtain continual feedback to understand what underlying factors may be stopping students from progressing to the next stage of the process. By continually



reviewing policies and procedures based upon student input, graduate schools could be more successful in helping students reach their goal.

This research might also be helpful in identifying students during the application process who are better candidates for admission. Admissions representatives can create tools outside of undergraduate grade point average and graduate admission test scores to select candidates. Measures may be created based upon intellectual curiosity, emotional maturity, and decision making.

After admission, through advising or mentoring, resources may be identified to support students through the graduate school process. Child care, family lounges, financial aid, research apprenticeships, teaching assistantships, peer guidance, writing/formatting training and other interventions could assist students in successful transitions throughout graduate school. Motivational factors, special events, and group support may improve the relationship building within the graduate student pool, cohort, or entering class to develop stronger bonds so that students can look to one another to develop collaborative relationships as they achieve their goal together.

Since graduate school can be emotionally and academically rigorous and could take many years of consistent pursuit, it is best to select those who have the traits, skills, and commitment consistent with goal attainment and persistence. While most students enter with a solid foundation, commitment to research or academics, and the determination to succeed, some students choose graduate school because they cannot find a job, at the urging of their family, or to ‘do something’ while they figure out where to head in their life. For those who are committed to specialized study, from the moment

they begin and throughout graduate school, life management, reward/purpose, academic success, and growth/transformation are all elements of the system that describes the experience. At any moment along the way, students may question the value of the experience and whether or not the outcomes are worth the sacrifice. Yet, with a deeper understanding of the elements of the system, students may locate and receive the support they need to accomplish their goals.

### Significance of the Study

Each year hundreds of thousands of students enter graduate school. However, there is an enormous gap between acceptance and completion. This study seeks to understand the factors that influence student persistence and completion and why approximately 50 percent of doctoral students do not finish their program. There has been considerable research conducted on admissions, leadership, and the importance of a graduate school education, but few studies have rigorously examined the graduate school experience from the student's perspective. This study presents a uniquely designed system's view of the student experience which may assist faculty advisors, administrators, and students to better understand both the challenges that arise and possible avenues of support to assist students in persisting through graduate school. The theoretical model of graduate student transformation produced in this study and salient viewpoints associated with each stage of his or her growth, are designed to aid admissions committees in selecting students with the range of emotional and life skills to

weather the pressures of graduate school while also providing tools, guides, cohorts, and/or funding. Furthermore, while there is a basic understanding of what helps students succeed, this study offers tools to support students through the decision points and advisors in their guidance to ensure success toward their academic goals.

### Research Questions

1. What drivers influence the graduate student in moving through his or her graduate program?
2. What is the relationship between the student (emotion, relationship building, drive, growth/transformation, and commitment to career advancement) and external forces (faculty, advisors, family, fellow graduate students, and potential employers)?
3. How does the graduate experience model compare to other theoretical frames?
4. What might faculty and advisors do to support students in achieving their academic goals?

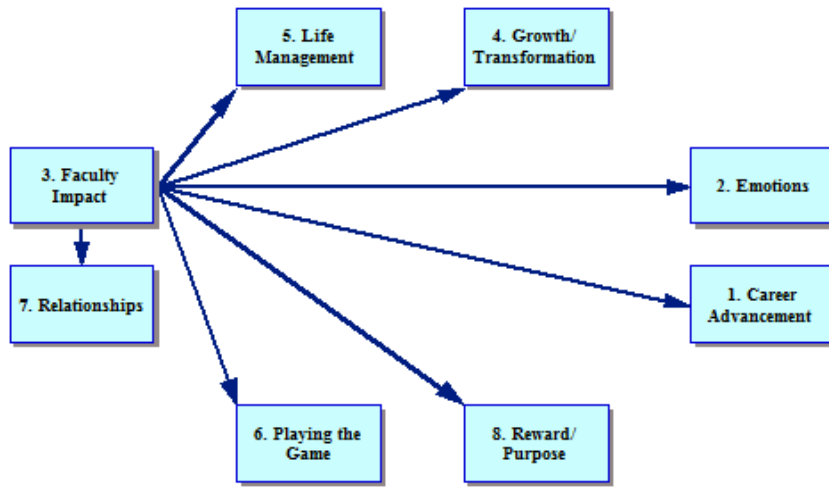
### Systems Theory and IQA

Interactive Qualitative Analysis (IQA) provides a lens to comprehensively visualize a systemic approach to a given problem. In this case, the problem is the phenomenon of the graduate student experience. The purpose of IQA is to represent the events, understandings, and senses in a picture or map that shows the interrelationship of factors or drivers. Systems, in general, describe the behavior, flow, and

interconnectedness of key elements and the relationships in what is termed a ‘mindmap’ (Campbell & Stanley, 1963) or System Influence Diagram (SID). Thus, in the graduate experience, the visual representation, or SID, can provide clues as to what students experience in graduate school.

In order to minimize researcher influence on the system to be analyzed, a sample from the population is selected for focus groups and these focus groups generate the basis of the data from their own experiences in graduate school. Thus, the process begins with a focus group led by the researcher who facilitates the process and asks the participants to recall and write down aspects of their graduate experience on cards. Then, along with the rest of the group, they combine and separate these cards into groups and generate affinities, or closely related experiences. After naming these grouped affinities, they divide into complementary linked pairs to determine the influence of one on another. Afterwards, interviews are conducted to better understand the system as it relates to the individual and develop a bigger picture of the overall structure or mindmap. The directionality of each element’s influence can be viewed in the resulting SID.

**Figure 1.1. Systems Influenced Diagram of Faculty Impact Driving All Other Affinities**



Branches in the SID, feedback loops, and recursions can be helpful in better understanding the dynamic flow of the system. Drivers that lead to specific elements might help to understand the influence one element has on another element. In the case of complex systems, improvements may be made to reorganize, simplify, and make the process or progress more efficient. Finally, elements and relationships with similar characteristics may be distinguished and placed in ‘topological zones’ so that patterns can emerge.

The researcher develops and considers the resulting system, interviews, and patterns and makes inferences of the phenomenon by considering the SID, relationships, and rich detail given in the descriptions. By understanding the elements and the relationships between the elements, comparisons may be made between individual or group systems. Extra-system inferences can be considered in order to develop advising and support interventions. This may also provide feedback and a deeper understanding of

the impact of the elements on their life so that students can complete their graduate program.

### Theoretical Framework

This Interactive Qualitative Analysis study seeks to provide insights into the drivers of graduate school persistence. Using affinity analysis, axial coding, and theoretical coding from IQA Theory (Northcutt & McCoy, 2004) a visual image will portray the graduate student experience. This study draws upon theories from Emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2004) and Social Judgment Theory (Sherif & Hovland, 1961) from social psychology, Situational Judgment Tests (Weekley & Ployhart, 2005) from cognitive psychology, and Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs, 2004) in journalism to describe perceptions that drive student persistence and chart a course of action to support graduate education in general and graduate students in particular.

## CHAPTER 2-LITERATURE REVIEW

We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.  
Aristotle (384 BC - 322 BC)

### Educational Crisis

Education can empower and for many people it does. Every year, though, thousands of students who begin graduate school do not complete their program of study. Our country can be invigorated by those who are empowered and energized by higher education. "Universities, and their scientists and scholars, have come to play a critical role in America's future, because they are the principal source of three ingredients essential to the progress and prosperity of nations: new discoveries, expert knowledge, and highly trained people" (Bok, 1993, p. 158). This value is diminished when students who enter graduate school are thwarted in the process or, if they do go on toward a new career or personal life direction, they are barred from re-entering graduate school if and when they choose to return. This dissertation considers those who endeavor to continue through their graduate school program, although the second obstacle of re-admission does warrant additional research.

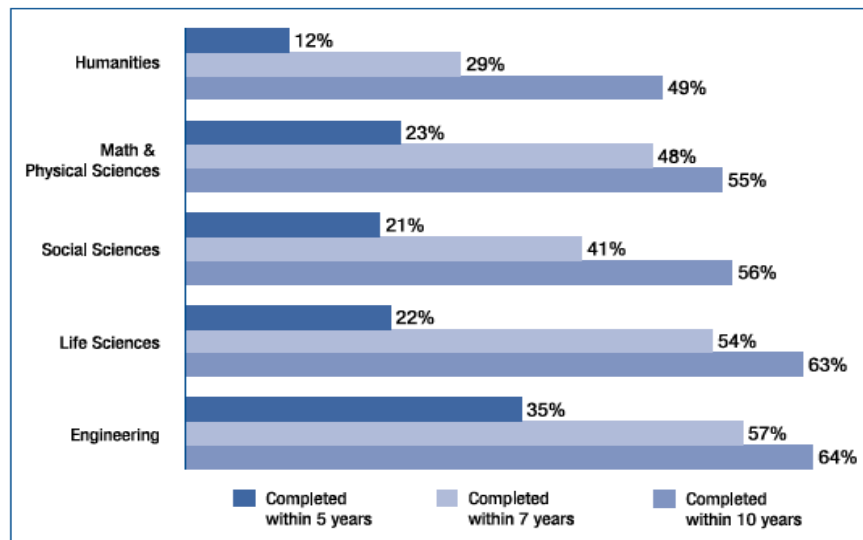
While it may appear that there are a considerable number of students who attend graduate school, the percentage of students who actually complete graduate programs is not high. In fact, approximately 50 percent of the students who enter graduate school do not complete their program within seven years (Bell, 2010; Nettles & Millett, 2006). The completion rate for doctoral students after ten years of study is also approximately 50

percent (Lovitts, 2001; Most, 2008; Nettles & Millett, 2006; Peters, 1997; Council of Graduate Schools, 2004). Data from a study by Bowen and Rudenstine (1992) showed that first year dropout rates in doctoral programs average at least 10 to 15 percent and a completion rate of 33.4 percent for doctoral students studying the humanities and social sciences. Data from the Council of Graduate Schools (2009) explains, “At the aggregate level, the data showed that 57% of the doctoral candidates in the sample completed their degree programs within a ten-year time span. However, Ph.D. completion rates varied by broad field, ranging from a high of 64% in Engineering to a low of 49% in Humanities” (p. 4), although seven years into their doctoral program only 29 percent of students in the humanities have graduated. Of those doctoral students attaining candidacy, 20 percent do not finish. Thus, a wide variety of studies show that attrition is high, although the Council of Graduate Schools (2004) explains that some of this is inevitable due to the uncertainty associated with the Ph.D. and the “greater responsibility for defining the scope of their educational experience” (p. 4).

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, 27.2 percent of the population have a bachelor degree or higher; 6.9 percent hold a master’s degree; 2 percent hold a professional degree (M.D., D.D.S, D.V.M., J.D, etc.), and only 1 percent of the population holds a doctorate (Ph.D., Ed.D., etc.). Meanwhile, according to the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS), “It is projected that about 2.5 million jobs will require a master’s, doctoral, or advanced degree between 2008 and 2018” (The Commission on the Future of Graduate Education in the United States, 2010, p. 3).



**Graph 2.1. Doctoral Completion Rate by Field and Number of Years**



Source: Council of Graduate Schools. (2008). *Ph.D. completion and attrition: Analysis of baseline program data from the Ph.D. Completion Project*. Washington, DC: Author.

Educational visionaries like George E. Walker of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching pose important questions. If we know that attrition rates can exceed 50 percent, how can this be considered reasonable, acceptable, or efficient? Golde and Walker (2006) said:

“Do we know why students leave programs? What happens to these potential teachers, leaders, and discoverers? Is it possible that some of the same factors that cause students to leave also permanently handicap those who survive a doctoral program?...How can we move toward the kinds of questions we should be asking – and answering – regularly about our disciplines and our programs?” (p. 423)

A review of higher education literature points to a festering and broadening recognition that higher education is in crisis, although it has been in this crisis mode for decades (Boehner & McKeon, 2003). Research points to education's reactionary response to its crises and dire need for a forward-thinking, proactive, visionary plan that anticipates workforce, economic, and societal demands (Galilee-Belfer, 2010). With the increasing diversity of our nation and the flattening of our world economy (Friedman, 2005), "the global competitiveness of the United States and capacity for innovation hinges fundamentally on a strong system of graduate education" (Educational Testing Service, 2011, p. 6). According to the report of the Commission on the Future of Graduate Education in the United States, "Undergraduate education is important to the creation of a stable economy because it provides students with foundational knowledge and work skills and prepares college graduates for a wide range of employment options. But it is graduate education that provides students with the advanced knowledge and skills that will secure our future intellectual leadership in the knowledge economy" (2010, p. 2).

In order to supply a broadly educated workforce, more international universities are developing state-of-the-art higher education research institutes. According to Stewart (2010):

It is abundantly clear that major regions and countries around the world have observed the research/graduate link and are adopting major features of this system in an effort to ensure a competitive foothold in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century economy. The growth rate of Ph.D. production in China, for instance, is breathtaking. Between

1985 and 2005, the number of science and engineering doctoral degrees awarded there increased sevenfold, making China third in the world in Ph.D. production...

Over the past decade we have witnessed the roll-out of the twin strategies of Lisbon and Bologna in Europe. The former commits to an increase of 700,000 in European Ph.D.'s produced by 2010, and the latter is transforming the structure of higher education so that it is more closely aligned with the American system, allowing easier credit transfer across universities and complementarity in the basic structures of doctoral programs. (p. 38)

The increasing focus on graduate school education abroad keeps attracting the top graduate students, both here in the United States and in the expansion and creation of graduate schools abroad. With the growth in international graduate programs and with programs modeled on the American graduate school, it is possible that United States dominance in graduate school education will succumb to the competitiveness of the research university marketplace. The digital age is also quickly changing the dissemination of information and the importance of computer and communication system competency (Kim, 2009). These challenges have been compounded by the lack of funding, need for cross-disciplinary scholarship, and shortage of graduate students of color (The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, 2010). Additionally, the fast-pace and differing lifestyles of fully-employed, returning students have spawned the rapid growth in for-profit universities whose flexible class schedules, varied course offerings, and more nimble ability to adapt to 'consumer' demand has driven their enrollment to record high numbers (Wilson, 2010).

Research universities have adjusted to the financial and societal pressures they face by developing specialized programs and corporate-sponsored research. By increasing the diversity of the student body, and to some extent the faculty, these schools are becoming more reflective of the communities they serve. Community responsiveness has also been a by-product of the greater dependency on funding by individuals and foundations, as well as accreditation and testing requirements for state and federal dollars (Gilliland & Tynan, 2010). Branded, corporate, foundation, and alumni programs have been created to raise money for scholarships, build academic programs, expand athletic facilities, institute donor-sponsored research, promote faculty, and re-connect alumni to their university (Schuyler, 1997). While there is an ebb and flow of projects and research pursuits based upon funding, from the student's perspective, graduate student curricula, pathway to degree attainment, and the search for purpose and meaning in life has not changed considerably. Students undergo a transformative process through graduate school as they pursue their course of study, manage life's challenges, seek individual purpose, and set goals that enable them to complete their graduate school education.

#### Student Enrollment and Graduation Data

New doors to higher education continue to open to a larger number of individuals and a more diverse study body. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2010, p. 74), "Post-baccalaureate enrollment has increased every year since 1983, reaching 2.7 million students in 2008" and "is projected to increase through 2019 to 3.4 million students." Not only is the population increasing, but academic

advancement has become possible for a larger socio-demographic group. Increasing numbers of women are entering academia; in 2008, 59 percent of post-baccalaureate students were female (NCES, 2010). “The number of Black post-baccalaureate students more than tripled between 1976 and 2008, from 90,000 to 315,000 students...The percentages of students who were Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander grew as enrollment numbers for these racial/ethnic groups increased five- and six-fold, respectively, from 1976 to 2008” (NCES, 2010, p. 74). More individuals are attending graduate school later in life, in part because of the increased choice of delivery modes and greater flexibility and availability of part-time programs (Redd, 2007). The table below gives the breakdown of educational attainment in the United States to offer an overall view of the numbers in each category.

**Table 2.1. Educational Attainment of the Population 18 Years and Over, by Age, Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin: 2009 (numbers in thousands)**

All Races		Total									
			No Educ.	Grades 1 - 12	High School Graduate	Some college no degree	Associate's degree	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree	Professional degree	Doctoral degree
Both Sexes											
	18 years and over	226,973	903	31,086	70,044	44,241	19,303	40,276	15,260	3,236	2,624
	18 to 24 years	28,688	59	5,515	8,418	10,409	1,465	2,640	142	30	10
	25 years and over	198,285	844	25,570	61,626	33,832	17,838	37,635	15,118	3,206	2,614
	25 to 29 years	21,256	27	2,393	6,113	4,361	1,856	4,927	1,258	204	117
	30 to 34 years	19,264	68	2,262	5,239	3,422	1,769	4,314	1,622	341	228
	35 to 39 years	20,445	63	2,384	5,506	3,472	2,086	4,487	1,754	403	290
	40 to 44 years	20,877	63	2,307	6,336	3,387	2,136	4,367	1,646	338	300
	45 to 49 years	22,712	65	2,413	7,348	3,824	2,420	4,350	1,615	346	330
	50 to 54 years	21,654	85	2,293	6,930	3,705	2,353	3,981	1,655	390	262
	55 to 59 years	18,755	90	1,956	5,691	3,413	1,823	3,466	1,722	301	292
	60 to 64 years	15,534	67	1,693	4,681	2,695	1,323	2,908	1,579	311	278
	65 to 69 years	11,825	82	1,827	4,179	1,904	781	1,711	893	250	195
	70 to 74 years	8,579	76	1,630	3,241	1,267	433	1,134	583	89	127
	75 years and over	17,384	159	4,416	6,363	2,382	857	1,990	792	233	193

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2009 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010)

## Need for Educational Advancement

With our nation's increasing debt, state budget deficits, and revenue shortages, the country's economic crisis will not subside in the near future (Daily Mail, 2010). This not only affects the United States budget and education funding on the whole, but to a great extent, the impact is felt in state support for public education, institutional resources, and students' ability to pay for college (Seligman, 2008). Entering students must balance the conflicting demands of their perceived need for academic credentials and desire to improve their viability in the workforce with financial commitments.

The personal choice between educational advancement and career opportunities mirrors the country's decision to fund education which may offer the benefit of innovation, industry, and tax revenues, versus paying for immediate social needs. Product-oriented development, new technologies, and scientific advancements may be valuable and sustainable sources of our nation's economic growth. Those individuals with technical expertise in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields are in high demand (Lederman, 2009). Furthermore, research funding and jobs are more readily available for those with masters and doctorates in STEM subjects, versus the highly inundated fields of humanities and social sciences (Doughty, 2009). Yet, it has become increasingly apparent that interdisciplinary competency is valuable with regard to writing, interpreting, and thinking through complex ideas, particularly with regard to cultural differences and meanings (The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, 2010; Newswander & Borrego, 2009).

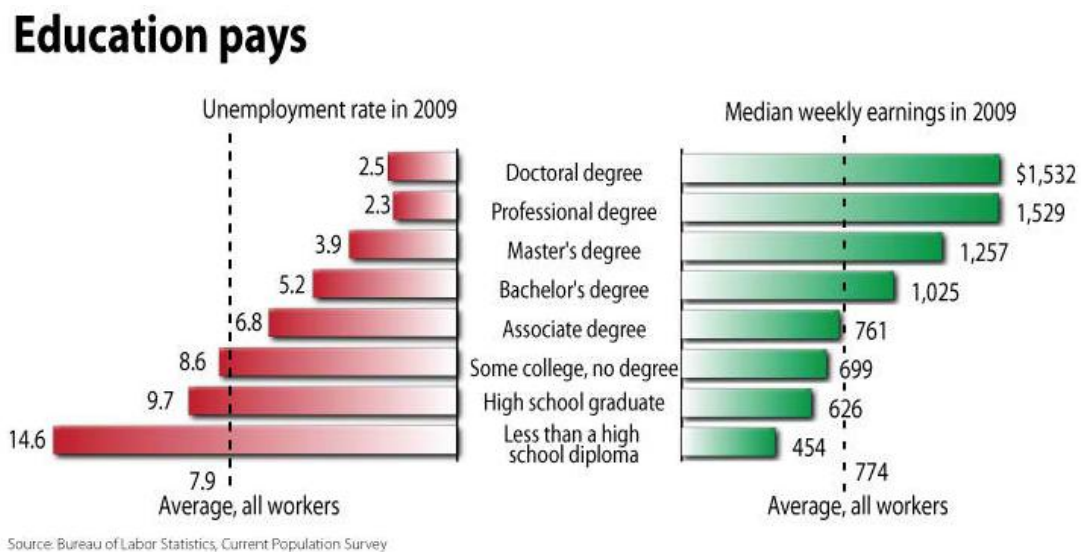
Along with the need for a wider understanding of world events, culture, and integration of ideas, there is a growing trend in higher education to better understand, integrate, and utilize technology. Through classroom visual displays and virtual learning spaces, students and faculty are incorporating digital skills that translate into a variety of organizations and institutions. There is virtually no office environment that functions without integrated computer systems, and these skills are essential to employers.

Online programs enhance this ability because the student must function in a virtual environment and interact with their professors through a variety of modes of technology. These environments have also expanded the ability to attend graduate school for many students who may not otherwise have had this opportunity. Cyber-conferencing and interactive collaboration through the internet has become more functional and user-friendly for those universities who have opted for more ‘traditional’ learning environments. Additionally, open source content, e-books, and online learning communities will continue to change the way education is perceived and developed over the next few decades. Thus, innovation in higher education may be one of the many keys to a new revolution as groundbreaking as the advent of the printing press or industrial revolution. With the need for breakthrough ideas and economic resurgence, the potential exists for education to lead the way for growth and expansion of industry and increased economic opportunity.

Educational advancement has other benefits to individuals as well. Strong verbal and critical thinking skills are developed, particularly with the fast pace of communication and the use of e-mail and writing through blogs and other streams.

Literacy is tied to employment and career progression. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), educational attainment is highly correlated to income. Similarly, as shown in the graph below, there is a strong negative correlation between education and unemployment.

Graph 2.2. Education Pays



Graph 2.3. Average Salaries by Degree

Year	Overall Median	Less than 9th grade	High school drop-out	High school graduate	Some college	Associates degree	Bachelor's degree	Bachelor's degree or more	Master's degree	Professional degree	Doctorate degree
1991	\$40,873	<b>\$17,414</b>	\$23,096	\$37,520	\$46,296	\$52,289	\$64,150	<b>\$68,845</b>	<b>\$72,669</b>	\$102,667	<b>\$92,614</b>
1993	<b>\$40,324</b>	\$17,450	\$22,523	<b>\$35,979</b>	<b>\$44,153</b>	<b>\$49,622</b>	\$64,537	\$70,349	\$75,645	\$109,900	\$93,712
1995	\$42,235	\$18,031	<b>\$21,933</b>	\$37,609	\$44,537	\$50,485	<b>\$63,357</b>	\$69,584	\$77,865	<b>\$98,302</b>	\$95,899
1997	\$43,648	\$17,762	\$22,688	\$38,607	\$45,734	\$51,726	\$67,487	\$72,338	\$77,850	\$105,409	\$99,699
1999	<b>\$46,236</b>	<b>\$19,008</b>	\$23,977	<b>\$39,322</b>	<b>\$48,588</b>	<b>\$54,282</b>	<b>\$70,925</b>	<b>\$76,958</b>	<b>\$82,097</b>	<b>\$110,383</b>	<b>\$107,217</b>
2001	\$45,300	\$18,830	<b>\$24,162</b>	\$37,468	\$47,605	\$53,166	\$69,796	\$75,116	\$81,993	\$103,918	\$96,442
2003	\$45,016	\$18,787	\$22,718	\$36,835	\$45,854	\$51,970	\$68,728	\$73,446	\$78,541	\$100,000	\$96,830
Average	\$43,376	\$18,183	\$23,013	\$37,620	\$46,109	\$51,934	\$66,997	\$72,376	\$78,094	\$104,368	\$94,487

SOURCE: US Census Bureau, 2003<sup>[6]</sup>



## Research on Graduate Education

University leaders concern themselves with attracting the best and brightest to their graduate programs. However, particularly in the sciences, the rapid expansion of programs leveled out decades ago and graduate student retention continues to be a challenge. Bennett Bertenthal, Assistant Director, Directorate for Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences at the National Science Foundation (NSF), explained in a workshop on graduate student persistence that there is compelling data to show that growth in graduate students in science nearly stopped in 1970. Jeanne Griffith, Director, Division of Science Resources Studies at NSF went on to say, “Besides not knowing much about the overall extent of doctoral student attrition, we do not know anywhere near enough about factors that influence whether or not students complete their doctoral degrees. We do not know about the impacts that such decisions have on their future earnings and labor force experiences.”

## The Effect of Marriage on Graduate Student Success

Marriage did not appear to be a significant impediment in most fields in terms of time to degree and completion. Research by Nettles and Millett (2006) showed:

Married students were less likely to stop out than their unmarried counterparts. Similarly, in education, engineering, and sciences and mathematics, being married or in a partnership proved to be a good predictor (twice as likely in engineering) of completing one's degree. Married and partnered student's also had a faster

elapsed time to degree than their single peers in engineering, the humanities, and sciences and mathematics (p. xxiv).

Using data from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's Graduate Education Initiative on 11,000 graduate students from 100 departments at 13 institutions over a 20-year period, Joseph Price (2006) found that the time to degree was greater than six years whether the student was married or not. For women, there was no significant difference between graduation rates between those who were married and those who were not. Although more married men finished their degree, this might be partly because significantly more married students already held master's degrees.

It is important to note that 747 students were eliminated from the study because they were still pursuing their degree 11 years later. Although we can still consider the data as given, it points to the argument that many students do not finish their degree or laboriously languish in academia for a considerable number of years before completion. The data offered by Joseph Price is presented in the table below to provide a breakdown of graduation rate and time to degree. The summary statistics show additional demographic information, including marital status. Significant differences can be seen, including significantly higher standardized test scores for both single men and women at the same time they have significantly fewer publications.

**Table 2.2. Summary Statistics by Gender and Marital Status**

	women		men	
	Single	Married	Single	Married
<b>Demographic</b>				
Age (mean)	24.8	29.8	24.8	29.3
Age (median)	24	28	24	28
Non US citizen	0.100	0.104	0.126	0.165
US white	0.659	0.67	0.659	0.622
US non-white	0.140	0.104	0.106	0.098
<b>Ability and Training</b>				
Prior Masters degree	0.194	0.342	0.216	0.381
GRE verbal	676.3	660.5	680.5	660.3
GRE math	616.4	588.4	660.1	633.6
<b>Outcomes</b>				
Graduation rate	0.571	0.573	0.592	0.653
Attrition rate	0.348	0.341	0.326	0.294
Time to Degree	6.28	6.35	6.23	6.26
Published during grad school	0.243	0.275	0.308	0.355
Number of publications	0.460	0.567	0.661	0.870
Tenure track position at 6 months	0.251	0.235	0.237	0.314
N	4,533	977	4,673	1,252

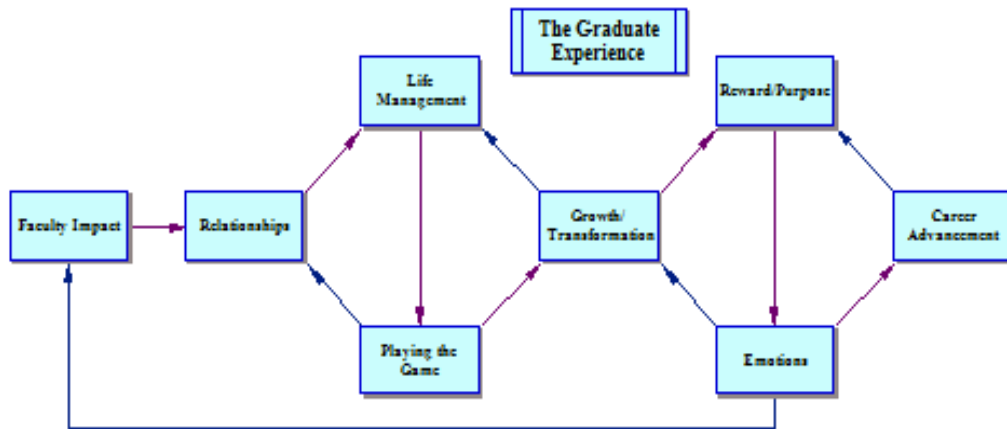
*Notes:* Bolded entries indicates that the difference in means between single and married students of that particular gender are significant at the 95% level.

### The Graduate Experience

Originally developed by Norvell Northcutt and Danny McCoy (2004), the systems influenced diagram (SID) of the graduate experience is composed of eight factors or affinities: faculty impact, relationships, life management, playing the game, growth/transformation, emotions, reward/purpose, and career advancement. The elements present a visual representation that will be further described in subsequent sections.

Using quantitative data of interviewee responses to questions regarding which affinity influences another more strongly, the data were developed into the diagram shown below.

**Figure 2.1. The Graduate Experience Original System**



Northcutt & McCoy, 2004, p. 390

### What Elements Make Up the Graduate School Experience?

**Faculty Impact** the overall graduate experience as advisors, research supervisors, teachers, mentors, coaches, encouragers, cultivators, friends, and support systems. Tinto (2006) describes “what is now a widely accepted notion that the actions of the faculty, especially in the classroom, are key to institutional efforts to enhance student retention. Though it is true, as we are often reminded, that student retention is everyone’s business, it is now evident that it is the business of the faculty in particular” (p. 5).

Negotiating twists and turns associated with the entire graduate experience is one aspect of graduate school life, but the primary drivers are the faculty. The faculty advisor

is at the focal point of movement through the program and other faculty members aid in the learning environment. Course selection is one part of this process, but other pivotal points may include research, proposals, scholarships, internships, apprenticeships, comprehensive exams, committees, and orals. A final treatise is often required as the culmination of the process. This is written and submitted by the student in a specified format and then reviewed and approved through a sequence of carefully observed and regulated steps by one or more members of the faculty.

Some faculty are present and active mentors, teachers, and coaches; they can also be powerful drivers and motivators, inspiring their students to even greater heights of research and original thinking (Strayhorn, 2010). Many faculty enter academia with the belief that a seed exists in each of their students and, if they support those students with relentless passion, they can both find and water that seed to grow to tremendous heights. This may not only further the research they are pursuing, but inspire students to think outside the box and create new avenues for further exploration in uncharted waters (Borrego & Newswander, 2010).

Faculty spend considerable time and money reviewing applications, interviewing, selecting, and funding those students they want (University of Miami, 2011). “In addition to financial support, the researchers found that the faculty adviser played a critical role in guiding doctoral students regarding the culture of the discipline and department. This guidance varies widely” (Malmberg, 2008, p. 41). While faculty anticipate great outcomes for the graduate students they accept into their department and welcome them with open arms, many return to their projects, travel schedules, and speaking

engagements, leaving the student to figure out what to do on their own. When graduate students have questions, complications, or need to understand unspoken rules, and do not know where to turn, some students experience a personal sense of bewilderment or abandonment. As they fend for themselves, they quickly learn that the relationships fostered between students and faculty can make or break the experience. When their graduate advisor or dissertation chair is helpful and encouraging in areas such as course mapping or a thesis/dissertation topic, then the process flows smoothly. Students often find themselves dependent upon faculty to determine specific requirements, conduct research, complete comprehensive exams, and develop a thesis or dissertation. Yet, not all faculty members are supportive, compassionate, or accommodating (Strayhorn, 2010). This is problematic when faculty must sign off on the thesis/dissertation. In some cases, faculty become a road block on the pathway up the final hill in the graduate school experience.

**Relationships** formed in classes, seminars, and group settings can provide a support system as students go through graduate school. Tinto (1993) explains that relationships developed by building a strong, inclusive sense of social and educational community are the key to effective retention. A 2003 study by Debra Dee Robole, supports the finding that the management of relationships in graduate school is more important than intelligence, scholarship, or any other factor in determining success.

Some students feel like they must brave the challenges they face on their own, but building relationships can foster greater ease and an increased comfort level. Not only can relationships create a friendly environment, they can be helpful in bouncing off ideas,

reading over an assignment, or asking questions about navigating the choices of classes, topics, software, organizational tools, research opportunities, grants, financial aid, and job prospects. Working closely with a friend, colleague, staff member, or advisor may be the most important link to understanding the myriad pathways toward making better decisions. In addition to being a support system through the program, they can be valuable networking partners long afterwards.

Social integration and relationship-building were found to be directly related to student satisfaction and this, in turn, determined institutional commitment and perseverance (Spady, 1971; Gardner, 2005). The more integrated a student becomes academically or socially into the institution through their studies, research, organizations, and activities, the more motivated they are to graduate from that institution (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1993). Considering quantity and quality, Astin further found that student involvement influenced the amount of student learning and development.

**Life Management**, in terms of financial obligations, home, employment, homework, living conditions, relationships, responsibilities, spouse, parents, and children, can be overwhelming (Goplerud, 1980). A child's illness or parent who is hospitalized can take valuable time out of an already difficult schedule. Assignments often seem ominous. Required reading in conjunction with recommended articles can seem endless. Long research and writing projects can put a strain on a marriage.

Making time for exercise, healthy eating, family time, and activities with friends must be a conscious effort, yet may be significant in contributing to the student's self-worth (Longfield, Romas, & Irwin, 2006). Languishing uncertainty can lead to self-

doubt, self-pity, or even depression. When paralysis sets in, it is difficult to write a required paper, take a difficult test, or finish a thesis or dissertation (Byars, 2005).

Hope slips through the student's fingertips and he or she stops in the process. Balancing family, friends, responsibilities, and finances is somewhat like keeping numerous balls up in the air while juggling each of them with equal commitment. This is compounded by the frustration of delayed gratification, guilt from not remaining connected to long time friends, limited physical activity, and sacrifice of career and life opportunities (Longfield, Romas, & Irwin, 2006).

Additionally, the cost of graduate school may stretch the family's finances to a point where it is no longer feasible to continue. Data from the National Longitudinal Study (NLS) of 1972 measuring the direct effects of student background, academic performance, and financial assistance demonstrated a significant relationship between receipt of financial aid and student persistence (Terkla, 1985). Despite the fact that many graduate students are independent and the journey is often lonely (Byars, 2005), it is important for students to remember that there are avenues for support throughout a graduate student's academic and personal environment.

**Playing the Game** of graduate school requires building networks and navigating often uncharted waters. Graduate students must be confident enough to believe that they have a great idea and that they will be successful, but humble enough to acknowledge that their professors are subject matter experts and know more than they do. They must be persistent enough to ensure that they get the required signatures and complete comprehensive papers and tests within a reasonable timeline, but patient enough to wait



for the very busy researchers, speakers, and authors to do their part in the process. They must know the procedures, complete required paperwork, and do it within a specific timeframe, even when the people they must contact are unavailable. They must be brilliant, out-of-the-box thinkers, while also learning to conform. Furthermore, many of the rules are often passed down orally between members of the cohort or student community. Understanding unspoken rules and perceiving uncommunicated objectives helps students know what to do in order to be successful. These lessons are often learned through the mistakes of others. Learning these rules, understanding the bureaucracy, being politically correct, and doing what is required, are all part of playing the game.

Playing the Game can be facilitated or hindered by the department's culture, advisor's guidance, and gatekeeper's support. The graduate student's faculty advisor plays a critical role in understanding the culture of the university, department, and specific research specialization and guiding the student through the process (Girves & Wemmerus, 1988). Kuh and Whitt (1988) suggested that institutional norms, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions provide a frame of reference to describe and interpret behaviors and events in the campus environment. An attrition study comparing completers and non-completers determined that differences stemmed from department structure, student's understanding of the process, and opportunity to integrate in the academic and social system (Lovitts, 1996).

Susan Gardner (2007) provides testimonies from students who explain that they must "rely on what they termed 'the graduate student grapevine' in order to understand what was expected of them, the guidelines they were meant to follow, and their roles in

their programs. These students clearly articulated their discontent with the ambiguous processes of graduate school, leading them to a level of dissatisfaction with their overall experience” (p.724). Students who become adept at *playing the game* can overcome the obstacles, build the relationships with key department individuals, and find out the information they need. Appointments, policies, procedures, protocols, and actions are expected, but are often unmentioned. Some are presented in websites, but others are not and must be figured out before moving to the next square on the game board that leads to graduate school degree attainment.

**Growth and Transformation** can be witnessed during graduate school through independent research, personal development, emotional strengthening, and cherished relationships. Arnold Van Gennep (1960) describes three stages that distinctly separate students’ rites of passage:

1. *preliminal rites* (separation)
2. *liminal rites* (transition)
3. *postliminal rites* (incorporation)

As students grows and develop over the course of the educational journey, they pass from one stage to the next. The transformation they undergo provides the strength and confidence to persist and succeed. From entrance and course work to specialization papers and comprehensive exams, to treatises/theses/dissertation, and then graduation ceremonies, students must make the required transitions or else they will not complete their program.

The learning curve for each graduate student may be steeper in one area or another. Peer-developed, faculty-designed, and administration-required group activities, writing assignments, and projects allow students to explore related areas that generate a deeper sense of self-understanding. Every learning experience in graduate school is a chance to grow. Professional, personal, social, scholarly, and emotional growth are all part of this process. The results are transformative. Whether or not the individual enters with substantive work experience, they often leave with a new perspective on life. When graduate students do not see this growth or are unable to adapt to the environment, they must work harder to overcome their personal, emotional, political, or social hurdles.

**Reward and Purpose** provide the fuel to remind the graduate student that the effort put forth is worth the time and dedication. Research in higher education borrowed from human capital theory is useful to better understand individual investment decision making. Studies determined that when pursuing postsecondary education, students weighed the economic and social benefits of pursuing a college degree. Researchers compared the costs and benefits of their degree program with respect to other choices, such as entering the military or workforce (Cohn & Geske, 1990; Becker, 1994). When tuition and fees were low, the perceived earning potential from earning the degree was greater. Similarly, potential earnings, when offset by scholarships, grants, and financial aid offers, influenced enrollment decisions and degree completion (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Paulsen, 2001). Students often compare educational costs and extrinsic professional rewards to their sense of purpose and intrinsic benefits of the learning they experience.

A strong sense of purpose can stimulate determination and drive to reach the next level required to complete the goal. Pride and personal satisfaction can be intrinsic drivers throughout the process. The pursuit of knowledge can be its own reward. The feeling of reaching a new level of personal achievement in presenting research, getting an article published, having your proposal accepted, or interacting with key leaders in the field can validate the work done throughout the program. For some, education provides a sense of accomplishment or achievement. The graduate degree often certifies that the individual has accumulated a body of knowledge and attains specific skills that are needed in their area. Students embark upon their graduate education in order to experience greater control over their future, though they tend to delay marriage in order to pursue higher education (Goldstein & Kenney, 2001; Price, 2006). With only a bachelor degree, some drift off their path, work in a lackluster job, or fall into a circular drain of rudimentary tasks. Attending graduate school can be an energizing force that infuses energy into a college graduate who has not realized their full potential in their career and offers new opportunities that inspire them to continue along the graduate school pathway to graduate and achieve their life purpose.

**Emotions** play a significant role in how each day is lived and each interaction unfolds. It is often said that attitude is everything. In graduate school, attitude and emotions make or break the student. “Increased anxiety leads students to distance themselves from the action or individuals causing the frustration. This decreases performance and often results in physical or psychological absenteeism, withdrawal, or disidentification” (Osborne, 2007, p. 136). Steel and Aronson (1995) determined that

African American students who were exposed to negative stereotypes demonstrated diminished performance on standardized tests. They surmised that the reason for the inaccuracy on tests was a result of alternating the student's attention between answering items and assessing their frustration. Stereotype-threatened participants also experience additional consequences, including self-doubt, diminished interest, decreased motivation, increased stress, and environmental disassociation.

Fear, anger, uncertainty, frustration, and disappointment are experienced by most graduate students at one time or another (Gardner, 2005). When these emotions are demonstrated publically or towards department members, faculty, staff, and students tend to avoid that graduate student. Extreme emotions can be difficult for other students to manage because they have so much on their plate that they may not be able to really work well with people they cannot or are unwilling to take the time to understand. When an individual is unable to manage emotions, particularly when criticized, he or she may be left behind, overwhelmed, or lost (Gardner, 2005). On the other hand, there is much to say about happy people who enjoy what they do and are enthusiastic about their research. People want to be around those who are happy. Research on emotional intelligence explains that a sense of groundedness reduces anxiety and allows a student to take events in stride (Bar-On and Parker, 2000). Positive, optimistic people accept constructive feedback, finish their program, get good jobs, and give back to the university (Hoyt, 2004).

**Career advancement** is one reason why students go to graduate school. As individuals assess their goals and dreams, they consider the future they will have with

and without their graduate degree. Soul searching and skill assessment are part of the overall process in deciding whether the next level of a job, a promotion to administration, or an entirely new career is worth the investment of the many years required to complete their degree. Andrieu and St. John (1993) found that at public universities, graduate students in fields with a low future earning potential were less likely to graduate. The long term investment was found to have a greater impact on graduate and professional school student persistence, particularly when financial aid increased, as did tuition and fees, and the net cost decreased (DeAngelis, 1998).

#### How Do These Elements Fit Together and Drive One Another?

Each identified factor that contributes to the overall graduate school experience fits together so that one element works to support the next and motivators and skills support the process in realizing the ultimate goal. When elements are incongruent or ineffective, then the process can stop or be slowed to the point of sluggishness. Why do some students drop out and never finish? What are the places where students get bogged down? What drives the system? Why are some students better able to manage life, emotions, transformation, and playing the game? Some of these answers can be found in the feedback loops contained within the system. The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines a feedback loop as, “The section of a control system that allows for feedback and self-correction and that adjusts its operation according to differences between the actual output and the desired output” (2009). The loops within the system demonstrate a relationship that can bog the student down and possibly lead to

the student stopping out or dropping out of graduate school. Considering the configuration of the system, including the drivers, outcomes, and feedback loops, it is critical to support students in moving through the challenges that may inhibit their progress.

### Institutional and Faculty Drivers of Graduate Student Success

Individuals seeking career transition and personal growth often consider graduate school as a stepping stone to build skills, increase knowledge, develop greater connectedness with their field, and gain the credentials to take the next step in their professional pursuits. With these goals in mind, many choose graduate school as their avenue for the growth they desire. Yet, not all students are prepared for graduate studies and, for those who are, predicting their success may rely more on emotional preparedness and life management skills than evidence based upon standardized tests and prior academic achievement.

Success in graduate school is a function of many factors. Certainly, the ability to write and reason are essential. Additionally, creative discovery, theoretical integration, and quantitative analysis aid not only in coursework, but in understanding the foundations of the field. Finally, the educational environment is dynamic. While many challenges in teaching and learning that existed decades ago seem to also exist today, technology and global interaction present new methods of operation. The evolution of education, innovative research, new sources of data, and increased accessibility via technology offer limitless opportunities for academic pursuit. There is an explosion of

topics for master's theses and doctoral dissertations. With the changing landscape of graduate education, this dissertation seeks to uncover the drivers of graduate student success and ways participants can navigate the process to achieve their desired goals for personal enrichment, life transformation, and career advancement.

### Socialization

Susan Gardner (2007) presents five themes that describe the socialization process: *Ambiguity* of expectations, *Balance* of graduate school responsibilities and interpersonal relationships, *Independence* and transition to independent scholar, *Development* of cognitive, personal, and professional experience, and *Support* from faculty, peer, and financial support. These fit within the model described by Northcutt and McCoy in the critical transition areas of Relationships, Life Management, and Playing the Game. During the first year or two of graduate school, students learn to acclimate themselves to the environment. The uncertainty of how to manage expectations and balance these with family and personal responsibilities tests the student's adaptability. If successfully maneuvered, the student learns what is necessary to travel farther down the graduate school pathway.

Perceived challenges before entering graduate school are assumed to be difficult classes, long reading assignments, and papers or projects that may take an extraordinary amount of time. While some of this is true, the greatest challenge that may lead to student withdrawal is the frustration many students have with impediments along the way (Lovitts, 2001). Many students are not prepared for the relationship hurdles,



administrative obstacles, and faculty expectations. These obstacles require specific abilities that are not related to cognitive acuity supposedly determined through the admissions process by GPA and standardized test scores, but through emotional balance and personality. By continued adaptation, commitment, and relationship building, graduate students can create the pathways to work with others, continue along the road, and finish their degree.

What some graduate students do not consider ahead of time are the interpersonal differences that exist when teams are built, obstacles occur in registration, funding resources are limited, cliques develop, or faculty are reticent in supporting innovative ideas. Students sometimes observe and interpret actions they witness as unjustified and unfair. Perceptions and suppositions can impede the entire process when students rock from side to side between confidence and uncertainty in what Longfield, Romas, and Irwin call the elation/depression cycle (2006). Emotional maturity, objectivity, and communication go a long way in minimizing misinterpretations. While conflict can exist, resolution of this conflict is also a function of the individual's ability to step back, consider avenues for positive outcomes, and act in a positive and professional manner (Hiatt, 2007).

At home, new challenges exist with family emergencies, spousal responsibilities, and personal commitments that may or may not be anticipated (Byars, 2005). Costs also seem to be higher than those anticipated and equipment, computers, access to resources, materials, books, transportation, and other needs for funding can be greater than budgeted (Byars, 2005).

## Cohort and Non-Cohort Programs

An increasing number of graduate programs are utilizing cohorts as a means of developing supportive bonds that will aid in participation, communication, trust, cohesiveness, empowerment, collaboration, and satisfaction (Greenlee & Karanxha, 2010). The popularity and success of cohorts has resulted in the incorporation of cohorts in a wide array of fields. Cohort programs may be one avenue for departments to offer student connectedness as they enter and move through their program. The supportive relationships built in cohorts often last beyond the program's completion (Barnett et al., 2001).

The cohort can unite to create a team environment through a process called “forming, storming, and norming” (Tuckman & Jenson, 1977), whereby students come together to create a team environment, learn more about each other, manage through differences, set goals that are bigger than themselves, adapt to each person's differences, and strive to achieve their overall goals. Cultivated and nurtured teams can create long lasting and supportive bonds offering security and stability. The relationships developed within this group environment may help students in understanding underlying, and often unspoken, rules that define the process of obtaining the degree and determining who holds the key to each door along the way. Learning how to *play the game* is often as important as having the ability to write a paper or analyze a document. Cohort members often aid in discovering the who, what, where, why, and how of graduate studies as well as answering other important team member questions.

Generally, cohorts are accepted in the same year and continue through core courses together, although they may select electives separate from the rest of the cohort based up on their individual research interest. Barnett & Muse (1993) propose three basic models:

1. The *closed cohort* - students take all of their courses together in a specified sequence.
2. The *open cohort* -students take core courses together, but choose additional coursework based upon their interest in various outside interests, specialties, or professors with whom they would like to study.
3. The *fluid cohort* – offering students the flexibility to enter and exit the cohort by taking self-selected courses based upon times, interests, and needs.

Successful cohorts are developed by faculty who facilitate a learning community of trust, collaborative problem solving, open communication, teamwork, and group empowerment (Barnett et al., 2000). Yet, while there are numerous benefits to cohorts, disadvantages include domineering students, inappropriate interaction, intra-group and extra-group interaction, the conformity of groups, peer pressure, clique development, isolation of cohort members, inflexible programs, and personal costs (Barnett et al., 2000; Sapon-Shevin, & Chandler-Olcott, 2001).

Through a process of group dynamics, the cohesion found through bonding allows for risk taking, commitment to group goals, greater participation, and group satisfaction. In a study comparing cohort and non-cohort programs, Greenlee & Karanxha (2010)

found a statistical difference in trust, cohesiveness, and satisfaction among the students. They also found that participation in discussions was higher for non-cohort students than cohort students, which they explained through what they described as “groupthink”. While cohort cohesiveness offered improved completion, motivation, community, and collaboration, it also led to conformity, censorship of deviations from group consensus, and screening of adverse information. Their overall conclusion was that cohort programs had benefits due to their group dynamics, particularly when faculty conscientiously built learning communities, but those students who were not in cohort programs could also be successful.

### Multiple Intelligences in Graduate School Success

Three broad classes of criterion measures generally determine a student’s ability to succeed in graduate school (Hartnett and Willingham, 1980):

1. General cognitive ability, critical reasoning, and analytical ability such as grades and standardized test scores,
2. Subject matter knowledge, experience, and professional accomplishment,
3. Perseverance and motivation; references, interviews, or other specially developed criteria.

While not considered a sign of intelligence, the strength of a student’s undergraduate record is considered by some to be a strong predictor of student success in

graduate school (Abedi, 1991), reflecting motivation, ability, consistency, and difficulty of academic curriculum. Others discount this by explaining that the undergraduate GPA is narrow in scope and that its meaning varies considerably between disciplines and universities (Willingham, 1974). The use of the Graduate Record Exam (GRE), Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT), Medical College Admission Test (MCAT), Dental Admissions Test (DAT), or Millers Analogy Test (MAT) as one criterion to select candidates for graduate admission may have some value (Kingston, 1985; Harvancik & Golsan, 1986; Kuncel, Hezlett, & Ones, 2001), but there are numerous cases where students do not perform well in graduate school despite high scores on these tests (Morrison & Morrison, 1995; Sternberg & Williams, 1997; Wesche, 1984). The use of GPA and test scores is a standard measure for nearly all graduate schools and yet the data widely vary as to their usefulness in determining a student's ability to succeed in the graduate school environment.

One area of current research interest surrounds emotional intelligence, self-awareness, personality, and associated testing. These assessments may determine the key factors in an individual's ability to manage stress, emotions, and life challenges both within the graduate school environment as well as throughout career progression and leadership. The concept of emotional intelligence, popularized in bestselling books and corporate business coaching, has not been thoroughly vetted in the research arena. Cain & Smith (2006) explain that there may be utility in understanding intangible characteristics, behavioral variations, and traits in graduate admissions in order to turn out more empathetic and socially mature professionals. Yet, they caution that, "prior to

advocating research in this area, several issues must be addressed, including establishing a clear definition of emotional intelligence and assessing the validity and reliability of existing measurement instruments” (Romanelli, Cain, & Smith, 2006, p. 9).

The hegemony of psychometric testing to determine an individual’s ‘intelligence’ and academic success is widespread. From the time a child takes an intelligence test at an early age, he or she is categorized as a person who has the cognitive ability to succeed down the ‘yellow brick road’ of education with relative ease. While this may be true to some extent, graduate school is very different in that there is not a rubric, course, or set of instructions. The graduate school environment not only requires the balance of dependence and independence, but it requires a complex personal ability to manage unspoken rules, multiple relationships, and a host of decisions that can redirect the student or completely toss them off the path. Thus, it may be that success in graduate school has as much to do with emotion and personality as it does with cognition and ‘intellectual’ ability.

### History of Intelligence Study

Human intelligence has separated races, social classes, and scholars since the beginning of civilization. Although a few individuals broke from their ‘destiny’, societal divisions cast the vast majority by skills, traits, abilities, personalities, gender, race, wealth, and other categorizations. When scholars began to quantify and describe human differences, most notably during and just after Charles Darwin’s development of the idea of heredity of intelligence (Darwin, 1859), research grew and the book Hereditary Genius

was published in 1869 by Sir Francis Galton. A quantitative foundation was established by Karl Pearson (a disciple of Galton) with the correlation coefficient,  $r$ , and the relationship between variables (Stigler, 1986).

Around the same time, a former British Army officer, Charles Spearman, reviewed data from those who took multiple mental tests and found that “If the same group of people took two different mental tests, anyone who did well (or poorly) on one test tended to do similarly well (or poorly) on the other....As long as the tests involved cognitive skills of one sort or another, the positive correlation appeared (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994, p. 3).” Spearman called this factor,  $g$ , for general intelligence or the capacity to make relationships from experience.

Alfred Binet who collaborated with Theodore Simon to develop one of the first measurements of intelligence (Binet & Simon, 1983), was fascinated with mental retardation. Although he used some of Spearman’s concepts in his work, “Binet believed that a successful test of intelligence would have to separately measure several intellectual functions or faculties” (Brody, 1992, p. 7). Although their concepts differed, “Spearman provided a theory and Binet provided a test. Their contributions continue to be important and certainly defined the world view of psychologists interested in intelligence for several decades” (Brody, 1992, p. 8).

Lewis Terman’s ideas on intelligence contrasted with Binet and, after coining the term ‘IQ’ in the publication of his book Intelligence, he became a leading figure on the topic of intelligence adapting the Binet-Simon Scale into the popularly used Stanford-Binet Test. While Binet believed that IQ measured biological and environmental factors

and used these to improve children's intelligence, Terman emphasized the predictability of achievement over time and used his test to separate students and divide military servicemen into job categories (Cravens, 1992). Terman had many critics, but most notably was Walter Lippmann, an influential journalist who feared the social implications of classifying human beings based upon an IQ test. He was vocal against intelligence testing and the way it was being used to predestine a person's future and potential by imposing a sense of superiority or inferiority based upon a single number. "As Lippmann feared, people did tend to give more credence to an individual's specific IQ score and make broader generalizations from it than was appropriate (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994, p. 6)."

The intelligence quotient (IQ) was further developed and deployed widely into society by psychometrician, David Wechsler, who created the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS) and the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC) which became a standard test for decades.

Intelligence was entwined in the eugenics movement that was studied both in the United States and Europe. Separation of people by 'intelligence' was one of the nefarious outcomes of the research and mandatory testing. Many who were considered feeble-minded or below average in intelligence were exterminated, removed from the general population, and subjected to racist immigration policies (Ballantyne, 2002).

Meanwhile, in the 1930's, E.L. Thorndike described the concept of social intelligence and its importance in building relationships and getting along with people (Thorndike, 1920). In the 1950's, Humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow considered



the emotional strength of an individual and the idea that when a person's basic needs are met, he or she is able to rise to a higher level in the hierarchy of needs. Thus, individuals can build emotional strength by satisfying their more fundamental needs. In the 1970's, Howard Gardner introduced the concept of multiple intelligences in The Shattered Mind, explaining that it is misleading to believe that there is one intellectual capacity, but that all individuals have several relatively autonomous mental abilities.

### **Emotional Intelligence**

The term emotional intelligence was first coined by Wayne Payne in 1985 (Payne, 2003). In the 1990's Salovey and Mayer defined emotional intelligence as "a type of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 189). The Consortium for Research on Emotional intelligence in Organizations (CREIO) and the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional intelligence Test (MSCEIT) have continued research in this area and have provided a foundation for the study of emotional intelligence. Through their work, they have mapped out a framework for verbal and non-verbal expression of emotion, reaction to events, and how a person's emotional strength is used in problem-solving.

As opposed to Spearman's *g*, or cognitive capacity and information processing, emotional intelligence is the response to signals transmitted as a result of environmental cues, frame of reference, and interpretations as they relate to perceptions in one's mind. There are critics of emotional intelligence who explain that, while there may be some

validity, the concept is loosely defined, used in a variety of contexts, and may be a function of personality rather than the criteria for ‘intelligence’.

The instruments to measure emotional intelligence have been criticized as well, particularly those that are based on self-reported (Paulhus, Lysy, & Yik, 1998). For example, the Reuven Bar-On’s EQ-I, a test designed to measure non-cognitive competencies such as awareness, stress tolerance, problem solving, and happiness, is a self-reported test. The BarOn EQ-interview was developed as a follow up of the administration of the BarOn EQ-I to obtain deeper insights and elicit information from five-point scale ratings (Bar-On, 2000). The Multifactor Emotional intelligence Scale (MEIS) is based upon ability. This test, which is considered more accurate than those that are self-reported is designed to assess an individual’s ability to perceive, identify, understand, and utilize emotions. “Although further psychometric analysis of the MEIS is warranted, the authors found that overall emotional intelligence, emotional perception, and emotional regulation uniquely explained individual cognitive-based performance over and beyond the level attributable to general intelligence” (Kirby & Lam, 2002, p. 133). The Seligman Attributional Style Questionnaire (SASQ) measures optimism and pessimism. The Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI) invites those who know the individual to rate their emotional competency. Tests that measure emotional competence are considered to arrive at a result that is different than emotional intelligence (Bingham, 2001; Boyatzis, Goleman, & Rhee, 2000). As Herrnstein & Murray (1994) explain, “Measures of intelligence have reliable statistical relationships with important social

phenomena, but they are a limited tool for deciding what to make of any given individual” (p. 21).

Despite the detractors, corporations continue to employ workers with characteristics that will enhance their organizations. Some companies believe their organizational effectiveness and efficiency is enhanced with those who have a high EQ. Human resource departments have looked to testing and analysis in order to find the right people with the skills and traits they need in their workers (Jaeger, 2003).

As these tests came to be developed and used to understand an individual’s ability to serve, lead, manage, and perform in a variety of environments, they have blended with a society fascinated with ways to explain the differences in human behavior. Popular books like, Goleman’s, Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ (1995) and Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee’s Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence (2002) have spawned a wide interest in the personal happiness and success derived from better understanding the management of emotions on the job and in life.

Different from cognitive intelligence or IQ, which is thought to be static from birth (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994), EQ is considered malleable and dynamic (Goleman, 2002). Even personality is considered relatively stable, e.g. a person who is introverted or extroverted when they are young tends to be the same later in life. Thus, individuals seeking to find a way to improve themselves and develop increased personal competence, self-awareness, and emotional control have sought wisdom through these bestselling

books, much to the chagrin of researchers who see this populist writing as somehow undermining the seriousness of formulating their theories.

Even so, empirical research continues to offer evidence regarding the ability to assess, regulate, and utilize emotions. Emotional intelligence has been shown to affect the workplace (Rosete & Ciarrochi, 2005; Stone, Parker, & Wood, 2005). “There is “considerable evidence supporting a link between EI and a variety of outcomes in a range of settings. Much of this research has focused on the workplace” (Cherniss et. all, 2006, p. 241). Nevertheless, graduate schools have not utilized strategies in emotional intelligence models to improve interpersonal and relationship skills within cohorts, laboratories, or in student-faculty relationships. Employers are looking for these skills and the findings of recent studies “revealed a strong relationship between emotional intelligence and academic performance” (Jaeger, 2003, p. 615).

Even though the concept of emotional intelligence is not yet widely accepted or satisfactorily grounded on an empirical level for many academicians, the value for education, leadership, and development of future leaders in the academy may have considerable merit. Dale Carnegie’s wisdom has been suitably vetted enough for people to take his body of work seriously, even though most of his work was in the mainstream of society.

### Applicant Selection

In some studies, data do not show a strong relationship between undergraduate GPA and standardized test scores and graduate student success (Auld, L., 1984, Girves & Wemmerus, 1988). Attrition in graduate school is high and what appears to limit success

seems to stem from navigating the personal and academic experience rather than the difficulty of the coursework. Thus, the psychological makeup of the graduate student, ability to manage emotions, and approach in developing relationships may make the biggest difference in those who succeed and those who are unable to cope.

Graduate school admissions committees review applications endeavoring to find students whom they believe will be the best fit for their institutional culture and academic requirements. This begins with standard university criteria. Students apply through a specified sequence of steps with a list of mandated elements. This traditional model is used by most universities, although many departments acknowledge that there are attributes and abilities not presented on the admissions check-off list that have proven to be equally important and, in some cases, more important than those long-established by the academy.

#### **Identifying Risk Factors**

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics 2010 publication, by 2008, approximately 57 percent of first time, full-time bachelor's degree seeking students who began in 2001-02 completed their bachelor's degree at that institution within six years. For graduate school, this drops to approximately half. In a 2011 study, Pleskac and colleagues developed a mathematical model that describes how students decide to quit. They used the model to analyze surveys from 1,158 freshmen at 10 U.S. colleges and universities. The surveys listed 21 critical events (or "shocks") and asked students whether these events had happened to them during the previous semester and were asked

if they had considered withdrawing. While there is a difference between freshmen and graduate students, each of these groups experience critical events and the number of student who withdrawal from graduate school in their first year is significant.

The critical event with the most influence was depression. Students were also sensitive to being recruited by an employer or another institution, losing financial aid or experiencing a large increase in tuition or living costs, unexpected bad grade, and roommate conflicts. They were less sensitive to critical events such as death in the family; significant injury; inability to enter their intended major; becoming addicted to a substance; coming into a large sum of money; losing a job needed to pay tuition; and becoming engaged or married. Previous research studied the role critical events play in employee turnover decisions. However, this was the first study to examine the phenomenon with college withdrawal, the researchers said. "Traditionally the problems of employee turnover and college student attrition have been viewed from different lenses," (Tollin, 2011, p. 5) said Jessica Keeney, a project researcher and doctoral student in psychology at Michigan State University (MSU). "But we see a lot of similarities in how employees and students decide to quit. A 'shocking' event, such as a clash with a co-worker or roommate, could be the final factor that pushes someone to leave" (Tollin, 2011, p. 5).

#### **Situational Judgment Theory**

Non-cognitive predictors of student success may offer important information for college admissions and career success. A 2004 research study at Michigan State

University (Oswald et. all.) uses Situational Judgment Inventories (SJI) to predict student persistence. This study that considered student decision making showed that a broader assessment of student capabilities can better predict persistence and success than academic measures. For MBA students, SJIs were shown to be better predictors of success than GMATs (Hedlund et. al, 2001).

In another study related to SJI's, Pleskac & Busemeyer (2010) used signal detection theory to determine a student's sensitivity to precipitating events or shocks such as tuition increases that might lead students to withdraw from college. The study concluded that success has less to do with desire to stay and difficulty of coursework and more to do with internal challenges such as life management, college financing, and employment opportunity. The associated Situational Judgment Test (Pleskac, 2011) is based upon Social Judgment Theory (Sherif, & Hovland, 1961). Pleskac's study determined that internal challenges can lead to a weakening of the person's spirit or ability to cope and may lead to depression. Another outcome determined that changing colleges did not leave those internal problems behind. Rather, students' experiences in the new college environment was similar, suggesting that managing personal life is a key component in student success. In a nationwide climate emphasizing persistence and graduation, answers are being sought to personal and interpersonal behaviors regarding leadership, multicultural tolerance, adaptability, perseverance, socialization, ethics, learning, curiosity, creativity, satisfaction, positive energy, maturity, and respect for others.

#### Agenda Setting

### **National Call to Action**

With numerous calls to action regarding the need for an educated populace (Jaschik, 2010; Jones, 2010), demands for technological innovation, and the need for the economic growth of our society (Bartell, Lichtenberg, & Vaughan, 1989; Cota, 2011), the high attrition rate in graduate school is problematic (Council of Graduate Schools, 2004; Golde & Walker, 2006; Walker et. al., 2008). For decades, the percentage of students who have not completed graduate school has fluctuated predominantly between 40 percent and 70 percent (Council of Graduate Schools, 2010). For those who do finish, many find their passion for the field diminished (Walker et. al., 2008). For those who do not finish, many feel like failures (Lovitts, 2001). Meanwhile, massive cuts to education have further challenged universities in their attempts to improve programs, modernize facilities, and provide additional resources to students. Calls for change, improvement, evolution, and revision of graduate programs have come from numerous sources including CID, CGS, GEI, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Commission on the Future of Graduate Education, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Department of Education, and a host of researchers.

### **Agenda-Setting History**

Agenda-setting describes the media's powerful influence on society and its ability to tell the public what issues are important. In his platform-setting book, Public Opinion (1922), newspaper columnist Walter Lippmann expressed his concern regarding the media's ability to present images to the public (University of Twente, 2010). As a journalist, he delivered information about the most prominent issues of the day and



aroused the public to think more deeply about events and outcomes. Lippmann captured the essence of his treatise in the phrase, ‘the world outside and the pictures in our heads’, explaining that the media transmits information by first filtering, sorting, editing, and presenting messages. He believed that the public reacts to the ‘pictures in our head’ rather than actual events. “For nearly all of the concerns on the public agenda, citizens deal with a second-hand reality, a reality that is structured by journalists’ reports about these events and situations” (McCombs, 2004, p. 1). Therefore, the agenda-setting process remodels events in the environment into a simpler model before individuals respond, or react (Sanchez, 2002). Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw carried this concept forward with data-informed models, research, and decades of books and articles.

McCombs and Shaw presented empirical data to support this concept from the presidential campaigns in 1968, 1972 and 1976. The initial research, conducted in 1968 considered the influence of information on public awareness. In the 1968 study, they assessed the relationship between the issues voters considered important in one community and the content of media messages used during the campaign. “Investigating the agenda-setting function of the mass media,...McCombs and Shaw concluded that the mass media exerted a significant influence on what voters considered to be the major issues of the campaign (University of Twente, 2010, p. 1).”

### **Core Assumptions**

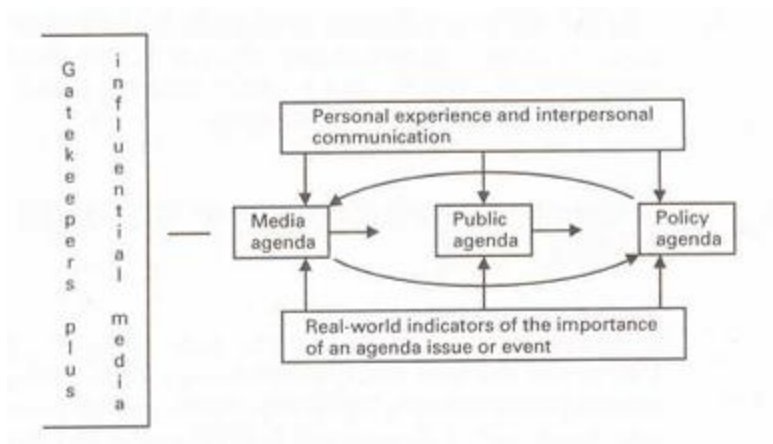
Agenda-setting is mass media’s ability to instill awareness in the public’s mind regarding particular issues and the transfer of salience of these issues. The two basic

assumptions that underlie most research on agenda-setting are (University of Twente, 2010):

- (1) the press and the media do not reflect reality; they filter and shape it;
- (2) media concentration on a few issues and subjects leads the public to perceive those issues as more important than other issues.

The media's gatekeepers determined which issues are important and determining, "which items to delete and which to pass through the gate" (McCombs, 2004, p. 115). This is also, in part, a function of the societal influences of the time period, the psychological characteristics of the author/editor, the political frame of reference of the gatekeepers and the inputs to the system.

**Figure 2.2. Gatekeepers Plus Influential Media**



McQuail & Windahl (1993) (University of Twente, 2010)

### **Higher Education Funding and the Agenda**

Across higher education, funding often determines the agenda and research follows the money, as opposed to researchers choosing the areas where significant development can make the greatest breakthroughs. “There are powerful forces built into the system of faculty rewards and institutional funding that work against the integrative model of scholarly formation and stewardship” (Walker et. al., 2008, p. 143). A request for proposals (RFP), federal grant, or foundation offers project money and researchers chase these dollars in order to fund their program. Furthermore, “less than 50% of all written proposals (e.g., in the National Research Initiative) are awarded funds, and some of the time spent on these activities represents socially wasted re-sources” (Huffman & Just, 1994, p. 746). Even when they are granted, some of these funds require universities to build major new research facilities in order “to undertake large research projects that otherwise would not have been undertaken, and to add significantly to research capacity in new areas or regions” like the the Soil Tilth Center at Iowa State University and the Soybean Laboratory at the University of Illinois, thus “politicizing science, reducing the average quality of research, and diverting research funds away from federal peer-review or formula research programs” (Huffman & Just, 1994. P. 746). The funding, though, is in specific areas chosen by the grantor. Thus, the tail wags the dog as adept grant writers re-tailor their research focus to fit the proposals.

Besides the need for funding changes and the back-peddling required as faculty respond to initiatives that reprioritize new education goals every five to ten years, agendas seem to be set by politicians rather than educational leaders. Thus, if this

dissertation is to inspire a substantive outcome, part of the goal is to present these ideas to university, state, and national leaders and serve as an agenda-setting avenue to help educational leaders better understand the graduate experience from student testimonies.

### **Complex Problems**

Walter Lippmann (1922), whose articles and books framed important ideas on many societal fronts in the twentieth century, believed that humans often made judgments before understanding the facets of a given problem. Since each person's construction of reality is different, the difficulty in accurately assimilating ideas is that these ideas are contextualized by those who write books and articles that explain the world from their perspective. Most citizens conceptualize images of societal problems based upon limited information while others need to be oriented to the concept from the ground up.

Complex world issues have numerous variables. This means that 60 second sound bites, even when supplemented with a page or two of newsprint, paint a very limited picture with which to understand the macro problem. Thus, most citizens are inclined to be focused on local problems or those they face personally (McCombs, 2004). Journalists, as well as those who define policy for the public, often remove the details of entangled issues to create a picture that resonates with the citizenry.

Maxwell McCombs (2004) describes how those who set the agenda can paint the pictures in the heads of the public, and agenda-setting studies show a clear correlation between the news and salient issues that resonate with study participants (Cohen, 1963; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Salient ideas are transmitted to the public through mass media. These issues frame national discussions and form a foundation for beliefs held by

the general public. For example, the ideas of bullying, plagiarism, funding, and social networking's influence on students have resonated with the public in large part because these are four issues that have been relayed extensively and accorded particular emphasis by the media. Thus, the public has been told what to think about and, if questioned about the issues that most plague schools, these might come up as four of the top five. Educational leaders must ask themselves what they feel are the most important issues in education.

If educational leaders collectively envision and articulate higher education's goals in a clear and concise manner and channel this platform and these ideas to the public, then the citizens themselves could create the groundswell of support to advocate for and facilitate the necessary changes, including commitment to funding. Mass media's powerful pictures, as described by Walter Lippmann, could paint students as involved, global, empathetic, and scholarly critical thinkers who actively seek, through higher education, to solve society's complex problems. As opposed to the picture of the 'party animal' who drinks, carouses, skips class, spends money irreverently, and does not take college seriously, the image could be clearly imagined and presented by educational leaders as studious, intentional - learners who take charge of their education and graduate. What this means is that if reducing attrition is a public goal, and if universities want to turn out globally-minded students with ethical standards who conscientiously participate in the collegiate environment and take academics seriously, then educational leaders must be at the forefront of this agenda-setting process. White (1972) brought to light:

No major act of the American Congress, no foreign adventure, no act of diplomacy, no great social reform can succeed in the United States unless the press prepares the public mind. And when the press seizes a great issue to thrust onto the agenda of talk, it moves action on its own – the cause of the environment, the cause of civil rights, the liquidations of the war in Vietnam, and, as climax, the Watergate affair were all set on the agenda, in first instance, by the press (p. 327).

#### **Need For Orientation**

Issues that are not familiar to the public require background and further information. This ‘need for orientation’ depends in large part upon personal relevance and uncertainty about the details of the issue. If education is to capture the public’s attention and educational leaders want to make this issue a priority, then they must explain why education is relevant to them and reveal, using salient anecdotes, the impact of the issue. For example, it is widely known that budget cuts impact schools, but few would ever vote to spend more money on educational programs without understanding the benefits of them. This is where the ‘picture in our heads’ becomes so powerful. This dissertation can sit on a shelf or it can define a role by resonating with administrators, faculty, and students. It can merely serve as a library reference to describe the graduate student experience or it can create an action. Yet, no action will happen without putting the implications and study findings into action.

## The Thesis or Dissertation as a Call to Action

This dissertation, in part, is a quest to find the answers to why half of the graduate students who enter do not complete, but it is also to create awareness and action. Perhaps, if graduate students truly believed that their research, dissertation, and further study were relevant, they would be more inclined to finish. There are many issues to consider, but some include public awareness of education's benefits, job creation through innovation, workforce development, and training of critical thinkers, problem solvers, and globally minded citizens.

Society today is not less complex than at the time Walter Lippmann described his ideas about the influence in the media or Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw first presented the Chapel Hill study (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) that laid the foundation for the book entitled Setting the Agenda. Additionally, the media shapes the public's consciousness. "The agenda of the news media becomes, to a considerable degree, the agenda of the public. In other words, the news media set the public agenda" (McCombs, 2004, p.2). This point is important if educational leaders paint the pictures that will clearly describe the challenges and opportunities we face. Technology and global competition are changing the landscape of knowledge and workforce skill requirements.

An information explosion has created a landslide of resources, references, and experts. Decision making is confounded by the myriad of choices, responsibilities, and challenges. The complexity of individual's lives makes it more difficult to stay abreast of economic, social, political, and local issues. Education is also faced with increasing pressure to adapt to an increasingly diverse student body, public scrutiny, limited funds,

social media, constant connectedness, and global competition. The issues facing the country today are interwoven. Those who are bright, disciplined and well-educated can be a source for wisdom in solving some of these complex problems. Higher education has the potential to produce highly-trained, highly-skilled problem solvers who emerge from graduate school prepared to help repair societal challenges that appear to be broken. Think tanks could bring together ideas from our nation's graduate students, inspire them to be part of the solution, and aid in supporting those who have not completed their graduate program. The United Negro College Fund's slogan "A mind is a terrible thing to waste" (Ad Council, 2011) is powerful. A 50 percent graduate student attrition rate is unconscionable. If educational leaders unite in specially designed forums to envision and produce the 'pictures' and set the agenda, they may be able to achieve substantive, desired outcomes. By proactively putting education front and center in the mind of our nation's citizens, we can develop innovative breakthroughs, provide a trained workforce, and stimulate the economy.

### Summary

Graduate school can be an extraordinary experience enhanced by stimulating seminars, faculty-directed research opportunities, and breakthrough discoveries. Yet, in some fields, the attrition rate is fifty percent. Perched on the forefront of knowledge, graduate students witness a breathtaking view of limitless possibility that lures many students into research institutions to extend their knowledge, achieve their personal goals, and advance their career. Pragmatically, there is also a strong correlation between



educational attainment and income. While the excitement of delving into a specialized graduate field of study can result in personal reward attainment, managing academic and personal life throughout graduate school is often not a straightforward clear pathway. In fact, some students never fully acclimate, advisors are often vague, there is no single course of action, and the implicit rules of game are not delineated.

## CHAPTER 3-METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

This Interactive Qualitative Analysis (IQA) explores the graduate school experience. The research conducted in this study, using the IQA methodology developed by Northcutt and McCoy, presents a systems-based model to describe student life, persistence, and success. Graduate students face academic and personal challenges as they proceed through their program toward continued intellectual pursuit, life goals, and career advancement. Life management, financial obligations, relationships, unspoken rules, transformation, and new opportunities lead some students to step out or withdraw. This Interactive Qualitative Analysis study seeks to provide insights into the drivers of graduate school persistence. Using the sequential procedure from IQA Theory (Northcutt & McCoy, 2004), a systematic, visual interpretation of graduate school diagrams the student experience. By identifying the elements in the system, the relationship between the elements, and the comparison of the system to other theoretical frames, an overall picture of the graduate experience will emerge in order to better understand the drivers and outcomes of graduate school.

### *History of This Study*

The Graduate Experience was originally developed by Northcutt and McCoy for their Interactive Qualitative Analysis class. As a part of the course, Northcutt and McCoy held focus groups and students conducted individual interviews with other members of

the class. Northcutt and McCoy compiled data from these classes to develop the original system that is presented in their textbook, Interactive Qualitative Analysis: A Systems Method for Qualitative Research. The main purpose of Northcutt and McCoy's data collection was not to develop a formal study but to apply a framework for students to be able to apply IQA methods in a practical situation and complete the study as a group with individual reports as the final project of the class. Northcutt and McCoy chose the Graduate Experience as their subject of focus since they observed that many students find that completing graduate school challenging, students experience the process differently, the subject would be of interest to the students, and participants could share their own personal experiences. This would also allow the graduate students enrolled in the class to become involved in the IQA process while relating to the phenomenon. Northcutt and McCoy started with a general problem statement and followed the IQA research design protocol.

The four phases of IQA were applied each semester. After several years, Northcutt and McCoy began to realize they were accumulating a significant set of interviews and began offering the data to students for a formal report. This formal study was developed using the interviews from Northcutt and McCoy's IQA class. The researcher was provided the raw interviews by Northcutt and McCoy and was left to draw conclusions based on the data for this study. The methodology in this section presents the research methods used to generate the data. Further information on the history may be found in the appendix.

**The Four Phases of IQA** (Northcutt & McCoy IQA lecture notes):

1. Research Design
  - a. Identify the “problem” or phenomenon of study (what you want to study)
  - b. Identify the constituencies (who you want to study)
  - c. Identify comparisons (for strength of analysis)
2. Focus Group
  - a. Identify themes or “affinities”
  - b. Draw a crude system
  - c. Produce an interview protocol
3. Interview
  - a. Produce rich descriptions of each theme
  - b. Identify relationships between each theme
  - c. Produce a system
  - d. Produce rich descriptions of each relationship
4. Analysis
  - a. Describe each theme
  - b. Describe each relationship
  - c. Describe the system
  - d. Compare groups
  - e. Make predictions
  - f. Identify other theories that resemble or support yours

### **Research Purpose**

This study examines the academic and personal life of graduate school students and the impact on persistence and transformation. Of particular interest are the relationships, emotions, and life management skills required throughout the graduate student experience and how socialization, emotional intelligence, and advising aid in the progression of students through their academic program.

### **Interactive Qualitative Analysis (IQA)**

#### **What is IQA?**

Developed by Northcutt and McCoy (2004) and published in their book, Interactive Qualitative Analysis: A Systems Method for Qualitative Research, IQA offers a systems approach to qualitative research, which uses grounded theory to advance qualitative research methodology. IQA presents a systematic, protocol-driven procedure to draw a unified, descriptive diagram portraying the influence of the system's elements upon one another. IQA's research design utilizes a set of organized rules or protocols to proceed through phases of the research procedure, identify factors that describe the process, and illustrate what is happening in the system. IQA presents a defined approach to research by identifying the fundamental building blocks of the problem being studied and constructing the problem's structure from the ground up.

## Theoretical Basis

### **Grounded Theory**

Derived from Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), the process and data involved in IQA methodology stems from individual descriptions. The information generates a model, the resulting system, to explain the phenomenon. In this study on the graduate experience, the data examined are student perceptions and understanding of social and environmental phenomena in graduate school and in their personal lives. This inductive, grounded formulation of observed information builds from these abstractions as both an aggregate of all of the data and on an individual level as well. Thus, from the collected data, the derived System Influenced Diagrams (SIDs) offer a visual context of the graduate experience to assist counselors, faculty members, and institutions in their commitment to improve graduate degree programs as their students traverse down the road toward their degree.

### **Total Quality Management**

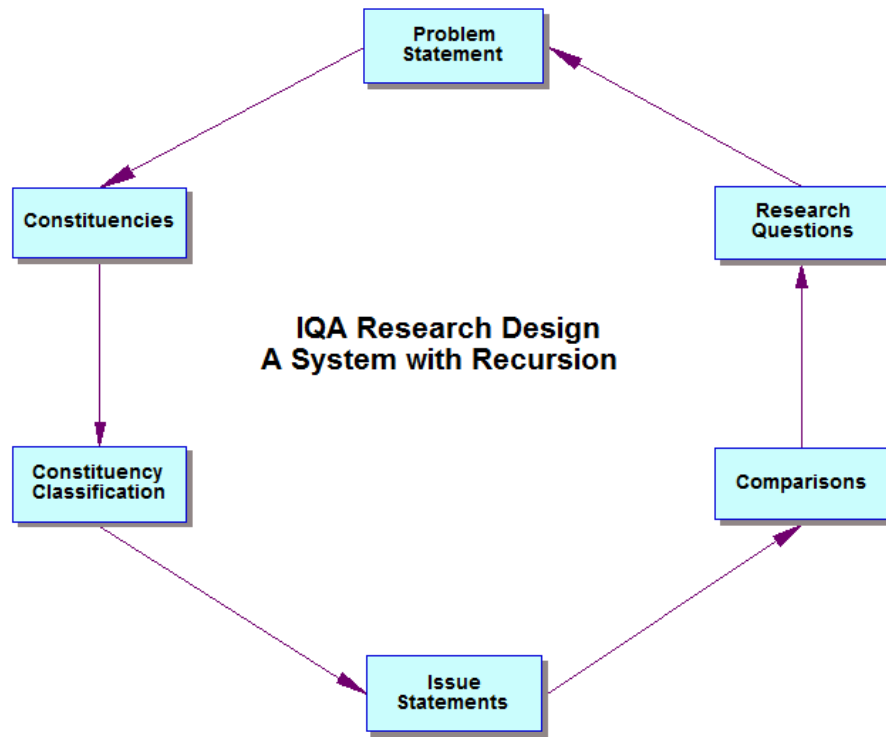
Using aspects of Total Quality Management (TQM), IQA builds upon the idea that continuous improvement of quality and processes occur when those who are integrally involved in the organization take responsibility for the outcomes (Northcutt & McCoy, 2004) and describe them in focus group sessions. Members actively participate in the unit's enhancement by providing input, feedback, planning, leadership, and incorporation of ideas (Cua, McKone, & Schroeder, 2001). While was originally designed for employee involvement in business development, the metrics involved and

protocol-driven procedures align themselves well with many clearly defined research objectives. Northcutt and McCoy explain:

A major TQM assumption is that people who are closest to the job best understand what is wrong and how to fix it. Similarly, IQA data collection techniques assist members of a group close to a phenomenon of interest in describing and labeling their experiences, and in articulating perceived relationships among these experiences to produce a theory in perception or a conceptual map (collective, in the case of a focus group, and individual, in the case of an interview), which is a systems representation of how a person or a group understands a particular phenomenon (p.81).

IQA's methodology provides the quantitative rigor of algorithmically generated data analysis combined with the qualitative descriptiveness of interviews blended together into a richly woven fabric of data collection. The inductive methodology of TQM provides a paradigm for recursive, systematic processing. Capezio and Morehouse (1993) explained, "Total quality and its commitment to continuous improvement require that work and process be thought of in a circular system" (Robole, 2003, p. 32). These circular systems and diagrammatic contexts are also presented in Northcutt and McCoy (2004).

**Figure 3.1. IQA Research Design**



Northcutt & McCoy (2004) p. 57

Embracing the framework from TQM, the IQA process begins by bringing together members of the population in a group facilitated process. In the case of this study, the participants are graduate students. Through interactions and personal reflection, they decide the best concepts and words to describe the experience. These focus groups are convened and individuals are asked to write what they feel best explains what is occurring. As an integral part of the research outcome, focus group members and personal interviewees add to the depth of the study by giving their individual accounts. This ensures a more robust picture of the graduate experience.

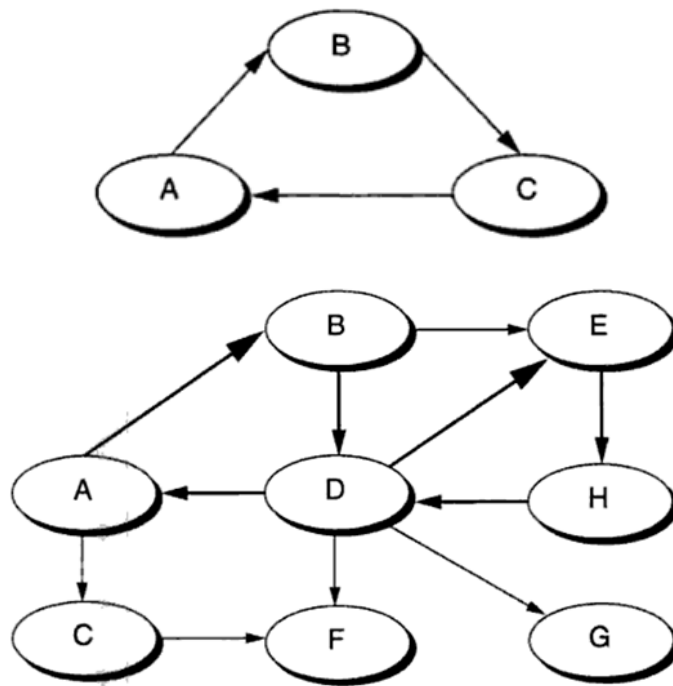


### The Research Questions

1. What drivers influence the graduate student in moving through his or her graduate program?
2. What is the relationship between the student (emotion, relationship building, drive, growth/transformation, and commitment to career advancement) and external forces (faculty, advisors, family, fellow graduate students, and potential employers)?
3. How does the graduate experience model compare to other theoretical frames?
4. What might faculty and advisors do to support students in achieving their academic goals?

The elements of the system may drive the system or they may be outcomes. Each component in the system will either influence another element or be the result of another influence. Thus, the resulting composite system from all of the data can provide a clear image of the interaction between the elements. Furthermore, in considering the system diagram of an individual graduate student, challenges or disruptions may be apparent within feedback loops. This information may be valuable for the student to understand where any challenges may arise and what interventions might help them move towards completion of their goal. The resulting systems diagrams might also be a valuable student advising tool.

**Figure 3.2. Samples of System Diagrams**



Northcutt & McCoy (2004) p. 30 and 31

### Population of the Study

This study seeks to understand the experiences of graduate students as a whole. The percentage of students who do not complete graduate school is staggering with percentages ranging from 40 to 70 percent based upon the program, subject area, and department. The general percent used in the literature is fifty percent. With all of the time, commitment, and money invested, if approximately half of all graduate students do not complete their degree program, then there are serious questions that must be asked about the students who are selected and the reasons why this is occurring. The population of this study includes graduate students in research-oriented degree programs who write a thesis or dissertation and take comprehensive exams.

While it is true that there are many factors and certain degree programs have differing stressors and distinctive requirements, the graduate experience incorporates many of the same challenges. There are differences between research-oriented graduate programs and professional programs such as medical, dental, law, and business programs, although the implications of this study may prove to be useful for all graduate students. In program individuals make choices to continue their education, invest a significant amount of effort into the process, nurture family and external relationships, manage time constraints, and consistently weigh the learning and challenges with their ultimate outcome or goal. The limit of the population to research-oriented students is, in part, because data was only collected from students pursuing research and because many professional-oriented graduate programs have relatively fixed time frames for completion. Future studies may consider individualized departments, programs, areas of study, or a larger population.

### The Sample

Over the past ten years focus groups and interviews were compiled by Dr. Norvell Northcutt and Dr. Danny McCoy, but have not been thoroughly analyzed. This previously collected body of research from faculty-led focus groups and 85 audio-taped, transcribed interviews, will be coded, tabulated, and analyzed in this study using IQA protocols. The focus groups and interviews were conducted by researchers at a large, public, southern, research university; the participants were graduate students in research classes at that institution. The master's and doctoral candidates who participated in this

study represented various disciplines, ages, and backgrounds. Some were in cohort programs while others were in different types of program structures. All of the students shared the common constituency of graduate school with the common purpose of completing their programs.

Graduate students were invited to participate in group sessions to discuss their experience in graduate school. These focus groups were facilitated by professors at the university and participating students were guided through the IQA process. In these focus groups, participants envisioned their graduate school relationships and activities, wrote down terms that described their academic and personal life, and grouped these into similar categories or ‘affinities’. These students were then interviewed to gain valuable, detailed insights of their experience. Focus group members as a whole and later during their individual interviews provided a more thorough understanding of the graduate experience.

Through the IQA process, the previously collected data will follow a sequential, algorithmic process. All interviews will be coded using axial and theoretical processes described by the Interactive Qualitative Analysis methodology. Following IQA protocols, the information will be put into a table of relationships and then sequentially tabulated into data that can be use to create pictures that will show the influence of one element or component of the system with respect to the others. The generated topological system will result in a binary, unidirectional mindmap (System Influence Diagram). Comparative analysis will identify individual and composite patterns and then categorize findings.

The results of the study will provide a context to better understand the dynamics of the graduate experience and support graduate students, advisors, and institutions in system-wide graduate school improvement. While previous research has been conducted on admissions, attrition, cohorts, faculty development, gender influence, and diversity in the graduate school environment, this study will produce a systemic view of the pathway through graduate school along with feedback loops and drivers that may show how barriers enhance or slow down the progress toward graduate student completion.

## **Research Procedure**

### **Introduction**

The framework of qualitative analysis is powerful in obtaining details that cannot be obtained by quantitative methodology alone. Yet, broad quantifiable outcomes are powerful and replicable, while individuals are so distinctive that they may have multiple perspectives on a single topic. The IQA process is a blend of qualitative and quantitative analysis (Northcutt, & McCoy, 2004) using algorithmic protocols that are quantitative in nature, but that retain the rich detail of an individual's experience. Thus, this methodology embraces the belief that structure can be utilized on that which is unstructured and clarity can be obtained by gathering information from thoughts and perspectives.

### **The Four Phases of IQA (Northcutt & McCoy IQA lecture notes):**

1. Research Design

- a. Identify the “problem” or phenomenon of study (what you want to study)
- b. Identify the constituencies (who you want to study)
- c. Identify comparisons (for strength of analysis)

## 2. Focus Group

- a. Identify themes or “affinities”
- b. Draw a crude system
- c. Produce an interview protocol

## 3. Interview

- a. Produce rich descriptions of each theme
- b. Identify relationships between each theme
- c. Produce a system
- d. Produce rich descriptions of each relationship

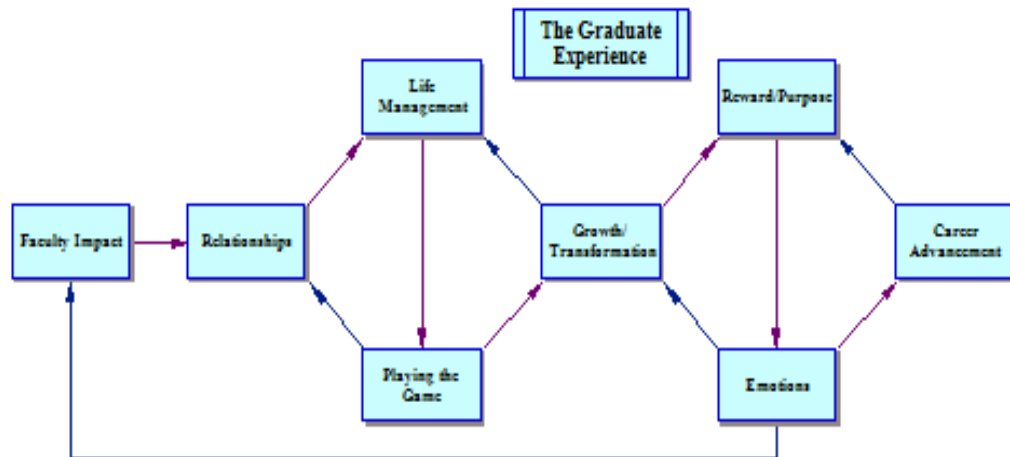
## 4. Analysis

- a. Describe each theme
- b. Describe each relationship
- c. Describe the system
- d. Compare groups
- e. Make predictions
- f. Identify other theories that resemble or support yours

### Comparison System

The aggregate composite system created in this study will be compared to the tentative Systems Influenced Diagram conjectured in the IQA book by Northcutt and McCoy (2004). This system is displayed below. In this IQA study, interviews will be coded, organized, and analyzed. Elements of the system will undergo the stepwise IQA procedure to arrive at the comparison system. Elements will be considered from a grounded approach.

Figure 3.3. The Graduate Experience



Northcutt & McCoy, 2004, p. 390

### Individual Participant Comparisons

The researcher will select six student interviews: two who identify themselves as members of a cohort, two international students, and two who have small children while attending graduate school full time. Since the interviewees were not asked beforehand if they were members of a cohort group, it will be assumed that if they said they were in a

cohort in the transcript, then they, in fact, were and if they did not mention a cohort during any part of the interview, it will be assumed that they were not. The two students representing those who had difficulty in graduate school will be selected because of the statements they made to this effect in the transcript.

An analysis of the six student interview transcripts will be used to provide information that can capture the lived reality of graduate students and hone in on particular characteristics of the graduate experience for these six students. These student interviews will be considered with respect to the aggregate composite system to examine possible relationships.

Like the process undergone through TQM, this study actively engages graduate students, builds consensus, and maps their stories. By following IQA's logical, step by step process, the relationships between the affinities will be identified. From the creation of the SIDs, the nature of possible problems may be uncovered. Inferences and analysis may offer insights and solutions for graduate admissions officials, faculty advisors, department members, and graduate students.

The IQA research process follows a systemic process that is efficient and effective. The organization can be visualized on the following three diagrams. This is the process that will be used in tabulating and graphing the interview data.

#### **Overview of the Research Design**

Below are three charts that provide an overview of the design in flow charts to more easily see the step-wise approach to the research process.



Focus groups and individual interviews have already been conducted. Thus, previously collected data, including the transcribed interviews, will be coded and put through the IQA process as an aggregate in order to produce the group System Influenced Diagrams or SIDs. The process for the focus groups and the individual interviews as previously conducted is described below.

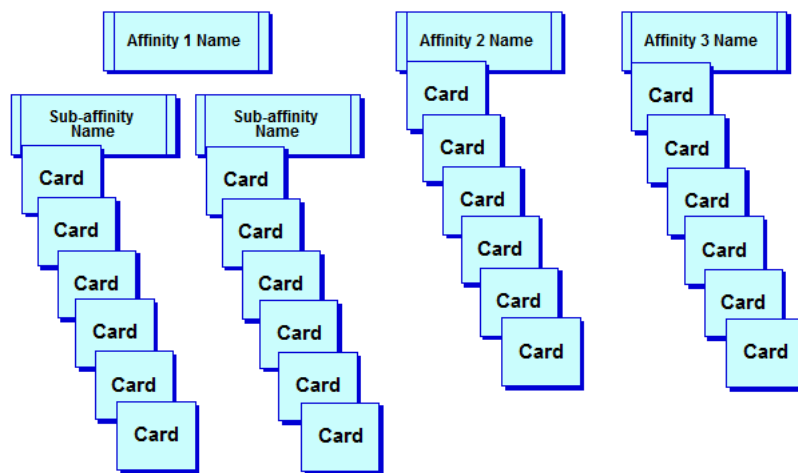
#### **Focus Group Process (Axial Coding)**

##### ***Dump, Clump, and Name***

1. The focus group begins with a facilitated discussion of the experience to be studied.
2. Guided imagery is used to allow participants to sense the experience and put their reflections on cards with one thought on each card. This process ‘dumps’ ideas onto cards so that all ideas are considered.
3. The facilitator collects the cards and hands these to participants to tape to a wall or on posters to be viewed by the entire group.
4. Participants are asked to organize these cards into logical groups. This is done silently to minimize the discussion at this point and to allow for reflection regarding groupings. In this part of the process ‘clumps’ are generated that will then be further refined.
5. The facilitator clarifies cards that do not seem to fit and those that may have multiple meanings. Clarity is sought in pattern and grouping identification through a unified process.

6. Sorted cards are observed in their 'clumps' and tentative affinity 'names' are given to the groups. Sub-affinities are also considered. The goal is to better define the components of the system.

**Figure 3.4. Focus Group Cards Sorted By Affinities**



Northcutt & McCoy (2004) p. 99

7. The range of meaning is considered within each affinity and greater clarity in the group arrives at names that best describe a broad view of the affinity. This *axial coding* allows students to go from general ideas to specific descriptions in a recursive, deductive process.
8. Relationships between the affinities are discussed in the group and influences of one versus another are considered. Participants are asked if affinity A influences affinity B; if affinity A influences C; and so on.

**Figure 3.5. Sample Affinity Relationship Table (ART)**

Affinity Name	Possible Relationships
1.	$A \rightarrow B$
2.	$A \leftarrow B$
3.	$A \diamond B$ (No relationship)
4.	
5.	
6.	

Affinity Relationship Table	
Affinity Pair Relationship	
1 $\leftarrow$ 2	
1 $\leftarrow$ 3	
1 $\rightarrow$ 4	
1 $\leftarrow$ 5	
1 $\leftarrow$ 6	
2 $\rightarrow$ 3	
2 $\leftarrow$ 4	
2 $\rightarrow$ 5	
2 $\diamond$ 6	
3 $\diamond$ 4	
3 $\leftarrow$ 5	
3 $\diamond$ 6	
4 $\diamond$ 5	
4 $\leftarrow$ 6	
5 $\leftarrow$ 6	

Northcutt & McCoy, IQA Lecture Notes 2011

9. Each pair of relationships is discussed and an interrelationship diagram (IRD) is produced.
10. Build a model of influences in the system to understand how the focus group understands the experience.
11. Interview individual constituent members asking them both their perspective of the system elements and to describe in greater detail how they perceive the experience.

### **Individual Interviews**

1. The interviewer introduces themselves, discusses the confidentiality of the experiment and explains that the interview will be tape recorded.
2. The study is discussed in general and the affinities or components of the graduate experience previously identified by focus group participants are presented.
3. Tape recording begins.
4. The interviewer asks about the experience the student has had with each of the affinities. Making sure the experience is clearly and thoroughly expressed, probing questions may allow for a richer or more in depth account. This is called the *axial interview*.
5. After each affinity has been considered and responses have been recorded, the interviewee is asked about the relationship or connection between each pair of affinities.
6. This *theoretical interview* continues until all pairs are discussed whether or not there is a relationship. For each pair, the interviewee is asked to give an example from their specific experience. Clarification is sought if the response does not clearly reveal what relationship there might be.
7. The interview ends when all affinity pairs are completed. The interviewee is asked if they have any final thoughts.
8. The interviewee is thanked for their time and the interviewer reiterates the guidelines of confidentiality.

These are summarized in the following focus group chart used by Northcutt and McCoy .

**Figure 3.6. Focus Group Warm-Up Exercise**

**Graduate Experience**

**Focus Group Warm-up Exercise**

I would like you to think for a while about life as a graduate student.

In a few minutes, I am going to ask you to tell me about your experience with being a graduate student.

So let's begin.

- Please allow yourself to be as comfortable as possible.
- Put your thoughts from the day aside to allow your attention to focus on this topic.
- Close your eyes to increase your state of relaxation and your ability to notice what you know about how you and others are powerful in their environment.
- Now imagine yourself in graduate school. (long pause)
- See yourself engaging in the activities of a student. (long pause)
- Notice your surroundings. (long pause) Looking around you, take in the sights, the sounds that are associated with being in school. (long pause)
- Allow yourself to become aware of your environment with all of your senses.
- Focus on what it feels like to be totally absorbed in the graduate school. Be there in your mind. (long pause)
- Review all your recollections up to this moment. (pause)
- Allow all these thoughts to remain calmly in your consciousness and ready to be revealed.

Thank you for allowing these valuable observations and recollections to come forward.

Please allow yourself to gently allow your consciousness back to this time and place and when you are ready, open your eyes.

Good. Thank you.

And now, with all that you remember—and that is all that you just noticed—please write down your thoughts on these cards.

Write one thought or experience per card. Feel free to record a word, a phrase, a sentence, or a picture to capture that thought . . . and

. . . Tell me about the Graduate Experience.

**Northcutt & McCoy, 2004**

## Interview Analysis

The data used in this study will not have respondent names, so confidentiality will be maintained. The next step is to remove conjunctive statements like “excuse me”, “oh”, “but”, “what I really mean is”, and so forth. Identifying words are also removed such as names of individuals, classes, and locations. When these are cleaned up, the affinity pairs are recorded for each individual interview. The data is coded by analyzing the axial and theoretical relationships, summarizing these in a pairwise chart with interview line numbers, and providing quotes that substantiates the influence of one affinity on another.

**Figure 3.7. The Graduate Experience Interview Protocol**

THE GRADUATE EXPERIENCE	
<b>Interview Protocol</b>	
<b>Axial Interview</b>	Focus groups have identified several common themes or affinities that describe their experiences in graduate school. Let's look at each of these themes one at a time and tell me about your experiences with these.
<b>1. Career Advancement</b>	Career Advancement describes as one of the reasons for attending graduate school. Tell me about career advancement.
<b>2. Emotions</b>	Emotions describes the reactions of students in graduate school.
<b>3. Faculty Impact</b>	Faculty Impact describes the student–faculty interaction. Tell me about faculty impact.
<b>4. Growth/Transformation</b>	Growth/Transformation reflects learning. Tell me about growth and transformation.
<b>5. Life Management</b>	Life Management describes the student life at home.
<b>6. Playing the Game</b>	Playing the Game describes the hurdles and the bureaucracy associated with graduate school. Tell me about playing the game.
<b>7. Relationships</b>	Relationships are interactions with peers, making friends, and connections. Tell me about the relationships.
<b>8. Reward/Purpose</b>	Reward and purpose is internal to the student. Examples may be pride or validation as a part of the graduate experience. Tell me about reward and purpose.

McCoy, personal communication, August 4, 2011

The axial code table is created from the axial interview. Each affinity is identified along with their transcript line numbers, axial quotation from the interview text, and researcher notes.

**Table 3.1. Sample Interview Axial Code Table**

<b>Interview Axial Code Table (Example) Interviewee #22</b>			
Affinity	Transcript Line (s)	Axial Quotation	Researcher Notes
Faculty Impact	182-190	My professors are supportive and are available to answer questions I have. They are also inspirational because they show me the power of education and how I can improve my skills to reach my goals.	Inspiration
	192 – 194	One time I made an appointment to clarify the procedure I needed to follow to complete my dissertation. Without hesitation, he first reassured me that I was on the right track and then explained the missing elements I needed to proceed.	Clarify process

Next, the theoretical code table is developed from the theoretical interview.

**Table 3.2. Sample Interview Theoretical Code Table**

<b>Interview Theoretical Code Table (Example)</b> <b>Interviewee #22</b>			
Affinity Pair Relationship	Transcript Line (s)	Theoretical Quotation	Researcher Notes
1 → 2	120-121	Yes, I would say that 1 impacts 2. If my professors were not supportive, I would feel that there was a breakdown in my relationship with them.	Support
1 <> 3	127	No, there is not a relationship between 1 and 3	
1 ← 4	130-132	In this case, I feel that when I have clear goals and I know that my hard work is paying off I feel good about myself. This is translated in positive energy, enthusiasm, and my sense of growth and accomplishment impacts my relationship with the faculty.	Positive attitude

### **Theoretical Coding**

Both tabular data and descriptive data will be presented in chapter 4. The tabular data will include the charts of relationships, affinity comparisons, and system inputs. The frequency of each of the affinity pair relationships will be recorded. An example is provided below.



**Figure 3.8. Theoretical Interview Process**

### Theoretical Interview

Many of the themes or affinities identified have some kind of relationship; one effects or causes the other. Let's look at each theme and decide if or how it relates to each other theme. Tell me about your experiences with such relationships. Please give specific examples of how the relationships have affected your experience.

#### Affinity Name

1. Career Advancement
2. Emotions
3. Faculty Impact
4. Growth/Transformation
5. Life Management
6. Playing the Game
7. Relationships
8. Reward/Purpose

#### Possible Relationships

$A \rightarrow B$

$A \leftarrow B$

$A \diamond B$  (No Relationship)

INTERVIEW AFFINITY RELATIONSHIP TABLE					
AFFINITY PAIR RELATIONSHIP			AFFINITY PAIR RELATIONSHIP		
1	2		3	6	
1	3		3	7	
1	4		3	8	
1	5		4	5	
1	6		4	6	
1	7		4	7	
1	8		4	8	
2	3		5	6	
2	4		5	7	
2	5		5	8	
2	6		6	7	
2	7		6	8	
2	8		7	8	
3	4				
3	5				

McCoy, personal communication, August 4, 2011

**Table 3.3. Sample Combined Interview Theoretical Code Frequency Table**

Sample Combined Interview Theoretical Code Frequency Table			
Affinity Pair Relationship	Frequency	Affinity Pair Relationship	Frequency
1 → 2	25	1 → 5	12
1 ← 2	0	1 ← 5	13
1 → 3	22	1 → 6	23
1 ← 3	1	1 ← 6	2
1 → 4	7	2 → 3	6
1 ← 4	18	2 ← 3	17

McCoy, personal communication, April 3, 2011

When all of the relationships are defined and the focus group analyzes the relationships, they record their responses on the Affinity Relationship Table and later builds the group Interrelationship Diagram (IRD). The combined relationships between the affinities are placed the IRD. Each affinity is analyzed against the others to determine influences. If there is no cause and effect relationship or influence, then the pair is left blank. An example of an IRD showing all of the relationships between the affinities is provided below.

**Table 3.4. Sample Tabular IRD**

Tabular IRD											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	OUT	IN	$\Delta$
1		←	←	←	←	←		←	0	6	-6
2	↑		←	←	←	↑	↑	↑	4	3	1
3	↑	↑		←	↑	↑	↑	↑	6	1	5
4	↑	↑	↑		←	↑	↑	←	5	2	3
5	↑	↑	←	↑		↑	↑	↑	6	1	5
6	↑	←	←	←	←			↑	2	4	-2
7		←	←	←	←			←	0	5	-5
8	↑	←	←	↑	←	←	↑		3	4	-1

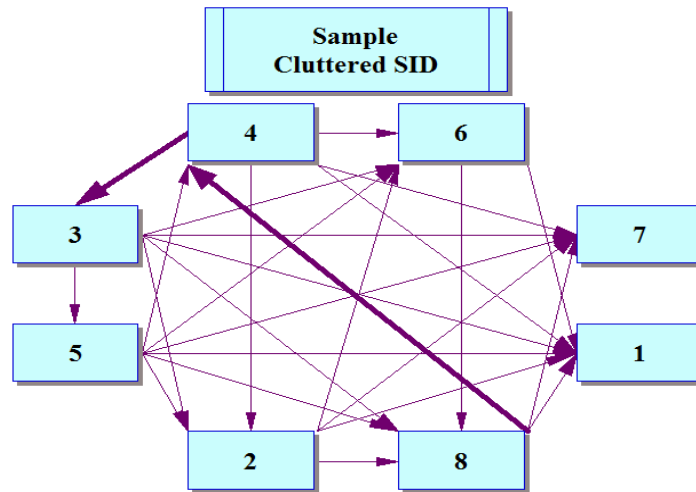
McCoy, personal communication, April 3, 2011

From this tabular IRD, arrows are counted as follows. Up arrows for each row are counted. The sum of these is put in the *OUT* cell for that row. Arrows facing left are counted and the sum of these is put in the *IN* cell for that row. The difference between these ( $OUT - IN$ ) is placed in the column called  $\Delta$  (delta). Positive deltas are considered drivers (affinities that cause the phenomenon) of the system while deltas that are negative are considered system outcomes (affinities that result from the phenomenon).

Using the information in the Tabular IRD, the deltas are arranged in order from the highest positive delta(s), primary driver(s), down to the smallest negative delta(s), primary outcome(s). The ranked order of the drivers and outcomes provides the ordering for the affinities. Using Inspiration® software, the flow of affinities are laid out starting from the far left (primary driver) to the far right (primary outcome) in an elliptical form.

This cause and effect lay out is the framework for building the SID. Then using links provided in the software, the relationships are connected to form a cluttered SID.

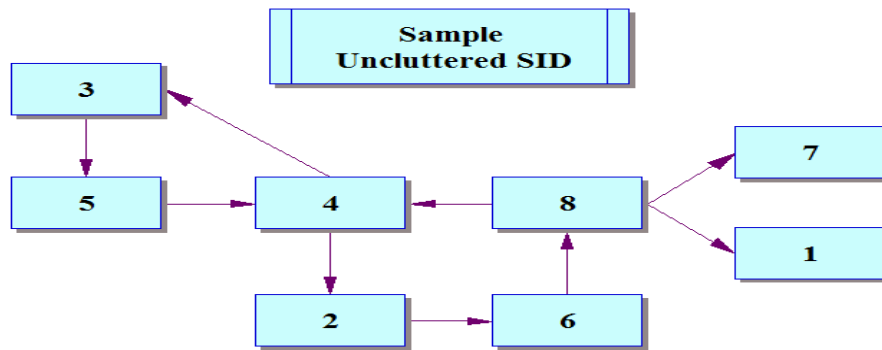
**Figure 3.9. Sample Cluttered SID**



McCoy, Personal Communication, April 3, 2011

The clarity of relationships is not visible in the cluttered SID, but by removing redundant links between pairs of affinities, a clarified flow of relationships are identified. This System Influence Diagram is uncluttered through this process and organized to reveal the composite SID. An example is shown below.

**Figure 3.10. Sample Uncluttered SID**



McCoy, Personal Communication, April 3, 2011

SIDs will be created for the six selected interviewees as well following a similar process.

All tables, interview charts, and resulting diagrams will be presented in chapter four. Write ups with interview results will also be presented. Comparisons between composite SIDs will offer insights into the system, influences, and implications.

**Figure 3.11. Northcutt & McCoy Interpretation & Implications**

### **Interpretation & Implications**

The implications section provides a forum for the researcher to analyze and interpret the data as well as draw conclusions based on the data. How one chooses to make comparisons is a matter of choice. We have chosen to analyze the composite system first. Next, we choose to identify opposing individual experience and compare them. Finally, we choose to treat the system as a theoretical model that can be applied to other situations and make predictions based on the model.

- **Composite System**
  - Brief tour through the system.
  - Describe overall placement of the affinities in the systems. Describe links, building the model from left to right. Give examples (you can put theoretical quotes directly onto your SID) of each link.
  - Highlight and *name* any feedback loops. Give an example, in the manner just above, of how each loop works; in particular, how it can *implode* or go negative. Describe way(s) to escape from a negative feedback loop.
  - Zoom out by substituting the feedback loop names for the affinities comprising the loops, working from right (outcomes) to left (drivers).
  - *Exercise the model* by presuming some given states or conditions of the drivers and then examining what the expected results would be (prospective scenario). Then, do the reverse (retrospective scenario) by assuming some states or conditions of the outcomes, and then examine the model to see what conditions or states of the drivers could have produced these outcomes.
  - Describe the overall timbre (hot to cold, positive to negative, bad to good, pleasant to unpleasant, lots of variation, little variation) of each affinity. Analyze the interviews based on timbre and quotes.
- **Individual System**
  - Discuss each affinity in the context of your interview.
  - Discuss each relationship in the context of your interview.
  - Describe links, building the model from left to right. Give examples (you can put theoretical quotes directly onto your SID) of each link.
  - Describe overall placement of the affinities in the systems.
  - Highlight and *name* any feedback loops. Give an example, in the manner just above, of how each loop works; in particular, how it can *implode* or go negative. Describe way(s) to escape from a negative feedback loop.
  - Zoom out by substituting the feedback loop names for the affinities comprising the loops, working from right (outcomes) to left (drivers).
  - *Exercise the model* by describing the individual's path through the system.
  - Describe the overall timbre (hot to cold, positive to negative, bad to good, pleasant to unpleasant, lots of variation, little variation) of each affinity. Analyze the individual interview based on timbre and quotes.
  - In the individual SID, identify the affinity, which, if its timbre becomes negative enough, will likely lead to a decision to abandon the doctoral program. (This step is particular to our case study.)
- **Comparison**
  - Compare and contrast drivers to outcomes, loops and the overall placement of the affinities in the systems.
  - Compare and contrast the timbre of the individual's affinities to that of the composite.
- **Predictions and Interventions**
  - Describe how the system can be used outside the context of the study.
- **Practical Implications**
  - Present a profile (in terms of the SID) of an ABD, contrasted to the student who is likely to persist. Using your own experience, the composite mindmap, and your interview, develop a list of survival techniques for grad school.

McCoy, personal communication, August 4, 2011

### **Validity and Reliability**

The validity or believability establishes whether the study accomplishes what it sets to achieve and whether or not it is generalizable to a wider group. The reliability of a study asks whether or not the study is stable or replicable. First, this IQA study, as in all qualitative research must ensure the “accuracy of the account” (Creswell, 1994). The focus groups and interviews were conducted by university professors and checked by a second professor. The coded data will be researcher-checked, member-checked, and faculty-reviewed for validity.

The procedure in this IQA study follows established protocols that are systematic and defined. Thus, the study is reliable. Elements are mapped so that they are free from researcher bias and interpretation. Participants provide the affinity names and their perception of the influence of one element on another. In order to establish external validity, results must be confidently attributed to the conditions of the study (Willis, 2007). The resulting tables and diagrams may be tracked from the coded data. The resulting SIDs will yield a verifiable structure from which to make valid generalizations. While the researcher will provide an interpretation of the results, observers who read this study can follow the information and procedure and replicate the study at their institution.

### **Missing Data**

Northcutt and McCoy initially designed the IQA study on the Graduate Experience for classroom use and did not anticipate using this study as a formal report. Thus, demographic data such as gender, race, nationality, academic discipline, and other

information was not captured. Further research using this methodology on this topic with demographic data could prove to be valuable to better understand the Graduate Experience from different perspectives.

### **Limitations**

The interviews and focus groups for this study were conducted at a tier 1 research institution. Participants in this study were enrolled in an Interactive Qualitative Analysis course primarily for doctoral students, although master's students could enroll. While the data gathered was from a limited group, the logic of the system appears to be robust. Generalizability of the system itself is an empirical question.

Interviewees represented a cross-section of the graduate student population from a wide range of demographics and majors. Specific demographic information was not completed by the participants, although interviews were systematic and complete. Future studies might both collect demographic information and disaggregate this data for comparison and analysis.



## CHAPTER 4-IN THE STUDENT'S WORDS: RESULTS OF THE STUDY

### Group Reality: System Elements-Composite Affinity Descriptions

Eighty-eight interviews were transcribed. Two were duplicates and one was not complete. Each interview contained two parts: axial (responses to the experiences related to the eight affinities) and theoretical (responses regarding the relationship between two affinities). The axial part of the interview was coded and analyzed to provide the specific examples in the text illustrating each affinity. Interview transcripts were given line numbers and separated by affinity. This *axial coding* was organized by affinity number and line numbers. Quotes, along with associated affinity number and line number(s) were placed in a table called an *Axial Code Table (ACT)* for ease of retrieval and ability to relate back to the source code. From each individual ACT, the axial data was transferred to a *Combined Interview Axial Code Table* where the quotes from all 85 interviews were pooled. This combined table provided a database of all interviews, codes, and connections to the original transcript that produced the code.

Examining the quotes within each affinity, distinctions were made to further divide the data into subaffinities. By identifying quotes that represented the student's story within these subgroups, common threads of quotes were cut and placed in piles within that theme. Quotes from individual interviews were organized, spliced, and summarized, affinity by affinity, to present a composite that revealed the graduate student's experience. These threads were woven together to create the composite quotes given in the axial part of this chapter. The following sections, titled by their affinity

name, offer a composite description of the graduate student's experience as described by the interviewees.

### Faculty Impact

Faculty Impact describes interaction between the student and the faculty members throughout their graduate school experience. The role of the faculty member was further identified as in the subaffinities: teacher, advisor, mentor, motivator/encourager, committee member, researcher, and networker. Interviewees also explain that faculty are more or less accessible to students.

**One of the great aspects of graduate school is the ability to take courses and see how different professors approach their role as a teacher, faculty member, and scholar in their field.** Among various roles of faculty, one is a *teacher*. "Faculty create the curriculum, plan their lectures, and assign individual and group projects. They provide students with valuable feedback. Much of my experience as a graduate student is a result of the interaction with the faculty and the work that they do. They can make the classes enjoyable. It is the faculty who determine the quality of the program. The good part of faculty involvement is the positive impact on our learning. The professors in my program are just excellent. I feel close to all of the faculty. Faculty can also make the environment exceptionally positive by setting a collegial tone. Nevertheless, each professor has a different expectation. It is important to know what the faculty wants from you. They expect you to relate to the class and to them on that basis and not create your own unique approach. In some classes I have significant homework, an inordinate

amount of reading, and long writing assignments. The work they throw my way is incessant. I work from early in the morning until late at night throughout the week, including working on projects that consume my entire weekend. Some faculty bring levity into the classroom which breaks monotony of graduate school. On all levels, faculty engage students in different ways and have a huge impact.”

“With most faculty, I am aware of how well I am doing, although with some faculty I wonder what they really think about my work. Faculty are the ones who judge your work. Faculty are wise scholars and they offer valuable critiques to classroom discussions and writing assignments. Even when they challenge the class, they are empowering. It makes me work harder. The faculty are natural motivators who encourage me to apply what I have learned. They are leaders who have experienced amazing careers and share their expertise. The faculty are also proficient in their craft. Faculty exemplify the best in pedagogy, research, mentorship, and relationship building. One professor in particular has been always available after class and is always encouraging. He goes out of his way to help. In the three courses I took with him, the classes were all intellectually stimulating. He is brilliant and an amazing support system. If I need something I always know where to go. Sometimes in a doctoral program you have to find a person who can keep you grounded, especially when life, family, and responsibilities around you are not so grounded. The negative experiences have been few and far between. Much of my experience as a graduate student is a result of the classroom interaction with the faculty and their subject area interests. Overall, the faculty have taught me as much about myself as they have about the course material. During their office hours outside of class, they

offer ideas about areas for further exploration and open doors to research opportunities. The faculty serve as teachers, advisors, mentors, and guides throughout graduate school.”

“The professors in my college are aging and you have a lot of what I call deadwood on the faculty. Sometimes there is not a good relationship. One course was as close to unbearable as I would like to get. The professor seemed to be bothered by the fact that I asked for help and bothered by even having to teach class. He made me doubt my decision to come to graduate school. Those types of relationships really frustrate me. In another class, the professor was disappointing. He not only had no knowledge of pedagogy, but he did not respect the real world knowledge of his highly successful students. I also had a very bad experience with an assistant professor who was my supervisor; he treated me like a slave. This situation went badly early on and I was unable to recover. That experience taught me to manage my relationships really well from the beginning of every class. Some faculty teach on a superficial level and many professors give status quo responses. When I came to grad school, I believed that my tuition paid professors to teach me something. But what I find happening here is that graduate students do all the presentations in class and the professors just sit in the back corner and it is often disorganized. A lot of times I do not want to come to class because I feel like I could just learn this stuff reading it on my own. The idea is for the professor to enrich the ideas through classroom discussion and I do not see that happening. What I see happening is when a graduate student says something in which the professor agrees, that graduate student gets the floor. I do not feel like the discussion is taken to as high a level

as it could be. I really think that there is an old, white, male mentality, too. From the administration's perspective, it seems like getting a graduate degree is all business."

"On the very first day of class one professor assigned every student a lecture to teach. He did not teach any of the classes and actually fell asleep in the back of the room on several occasions while the students were presenting. At this stage, I have been through enough to know that not everything is going to be pleasant. Even though my overall experience has been positive and this experience was isolated, it was still a terribly painful event. I would go to great lengths to avoid and actually pick classes with faculty members with whom I am compatible and I think do their job. Faculty interaction is important in the classroom. They provide the academic focus of material brought presented to the class. But outside the classroom, I do not really have much interaction with the professors. In terms of the core academic classes, faculty have a strong impact, but once I leave the classroom, faculty do not have any relevance. I am conflicted on that because I think some professors are very open to ideas and they really encourage you to say what you really think, what I really think. Other professors pay you lip-service, but they do not really encourage interaction in class discussion or an exchange of ideas. A lot of times grades are based more on the personality or interaction between the student and professor than they are on academic performance."

**Faculty focus on the skills and abilities they see that you may not realize you possess at this particular point in time in your career.** Some faculty serve as *advisors* throughout the graduate experience. "My advisor keeps me on track. When I was an undergraduate, I was just a number amongst everyone else, but I got through it. When I

entered as a graduate student, the faculty helped me move on and figure out what classes I needed to take. I could see anyone within my area and find out if I was on the right track or if there was a better time to take a certain course because some are only offered every two years. The faculty has had a major impact on my experience and they have helped it run smoother than my undergraduate experience when I had no idea where to go and did not know anyone. The program the Air Force is paying for has a time limit. I am only here for three years. When I am done with my three years, whether I have a degree in hand or not I have to leave the country. Fortunately, I have been blessed with faculty advisors on my committee who understand that. They told me that if I do all of the hard work, they will give me my degree in three years. So, I count on their advice.”

“My expectation and reality differed, though, in faculty advising. My advisor in my master’s program transformed my way of working with others. She demonstrated how to build close faculty and peer relationships through group study sessions. My advisor has a great personality. She is practical, supportive, friendly, kind, and funny. She is really good to work with. She cares about you as a person. She is honest. My advisor provides valuable feedback with explanations, notes, discussions, meetings, and encouraging words. There are two sides of her; she is professional and sensitive. I had a really good relationship last semester with another one of my teachers. She approached me to see if I would like her to be my advisor because she was so interested in my comments in class. Advisors can see your potential, encourage you, and bring the best out of you. There is no thought of failure in this program; I mean, you never think you are

going to fail. Since everyone is confident they will succeed, there is no thought of dropping out. Faculty are very supportive.”

“In terms of advisement, my primary advisor has been somewhat hands-off. This is disconcerting in the sense that she was assigned to be my advisor since the first day, but now she has indicated that she was my impromptu advisor. Still, on my record, she has been designated as my actual assigned advisor for the past three years. I actually was in another graduate program before going into this field. Throughout that program, as a master’s degree student, I was shut out from classes because of the advisor in that program. I had a bad experience with my thesis advisor which sort of put a dent in my feelings about graduate school. So, my experience with advisors has not been great. In all fairness, you need them to sit down and talk you through the courses. Your advisor can explain what is available. I have taken classes where sometimes the title said one thing and then when I got into the class it was not what I had expected. You need that guidance. Advisors are waiting for you to come and say this is what I am interested in; this is what I think I might take. Faculty do not consider my life or my relationships; all of the advice is strictly business.”

“My first advisor was a mismatch of energy and intensity. It was negative because I was unable to have relaxed discussions with my advisor. Every time I saw my advisor, she would rattle off a bunch of things she wanted me to do. She never asked about my weekend or how I was doing. There was nothing humanistic or informal about our conversations. While I did not expect to be friends, I did expect for her to care. The whole relationship does not have to be informal; it would just add a personal touch.

Faculty have had the most influence since my original match for an advisor was not a good one, mostly on an energy level. I am an out-of-state student. I do not know much about this state. I do not know the system here. I do not know the classes I could or should take that would satisfy my program requirements. There is a doctoral study manual, but half of the classes on the list are either not offered anymore, because the faculty have left, or they have substituted the old courses with new courses that are not listed. I need to know the timeline and procedures for doing my dissertation. I need to know if I am on track or off track. I am away from my family and do not want to waste additional time here away from them. I want to get in, do a good job, and get out. My faculty advisor at this university is very busy and popular. He is on a couple dozen committees and teaches two to three courses each semester because we lost a faculty position a couple years ago. Now, my advisor chairs or participates in many dissertation committees. He is a very nice man: knowledgeable, cordial, and respectful to everybody including his students. I always learn something from him whenever he has time, but it is very difficult to get face-to-face time with him. I am not a needy person, but I do need advice, support, and connections to get through the program. Outside of him, I have three professors with whom I am working right now. I know all of them and I took classes with them, so I have had some interactions with them. Typically, the interaction with them is started by me first. They are very kind to me, but sometimes our relationship is too superficial regarding what I need to accomplish and how I am progressing. I do not talk with them about my personal life. There is an interaction with them, but it is a little superficial.”



“In general, I have mixed feelings about my relationships with faculty. I am an international student. I came here in 2007. A little while ago, I met my academic advisor while I was in my master’s program. My academic advisor was not really kind to me. He did not spend much time for counseling or any sort of supervising for my research project. I got really frustrated because of this, so my relationship did not start very good with him. It is getting better, but in general it was never good. The faculty impact was very strong. In my department it is pretty frustrating. Obviously faculty have a lot of impact on Ph.D. students. The one thing that I feel is missing in our department is guidance. There is no mentor program and nothing to help us in the beginning as new Ph.D.’s. I think that has a lot of impact on us because the faculty do not go out of their way really, unless you go to them. Even if you go to them, they do not go out of their way to help you decide what courses to take, how to schedule your semester, how to organize your Ph.D. program. Several faculty members respond to e-mails, but I do not feel their impact in guiding my course selection. In all fairness, just starting out you are not exactly sure what to do and you need them to be available throughout the process as an advisor. Just looking at the course title is often misleading. In one way it is frustrating, but the good part of faculty involvement is the positive impact on our learning. My situation here has really forced me to grow up, to be more independent. Perhaps, it is the way they train leaders here. Because of my encounters, I have had to be creative and manage my professors, at least find innovative ways to get information to and from them. Choosing a faculty member who knows your research interests is very important. When you are sitting across a table from someone, you are able to relax, talk about a topic,

explore an idea, and have a good conversation. You begin to feel comfortable with them. My advisor made my first year challenging. Fortunately, I was able to change my advisor early on and so my second year the impact of faculty has been much more positive."

**We interact with faculty not just inside the classroom, but outside.** Another role students identified was that of a *mentor*. "The mentors in my program have certain expectations of us that we are expected live up to as students and professionals. I look to them for professional advice and I respect what they have to say. An important part of the job of a faculty member is to mentor students based upon their skills and interests. The faculty in my cohort program arrange collaborative meetings and we work closely with the mentors so that we all succeed. The faculty also bring in speakers who serve as outside mentors to come to the university to talk to our cohort. We go out to dinner with both the speakers and the faculty mentors. The program's mentors stay in touch with me and make sure they know where I am mentally as well as academically. They make a big point of stopping and checking in with me. When they ask how I am doing, it is not a cursory social question as they pass by asking how I am. They really want to know what I am experiencing. On more than one occasion and they have stopped me in the hallway, placed their hands on my shoulder, forced me to stop and look them directly in the eye, and tell them how I am. I feel like there is some real interest in me as a person and my success in the program. You rely on their advice in terms of course selection, direction when you are writing papers, developing topics and talking about dissertations. The faculty in this program are very supportive. That support, which comes in all forms, inspires me to stick with the program even when it is difficult. If they have a problem

with what a student is doing, they will talk to that student. They help each of us plan for the future, get jobs, and plan internships. Their direction is a big key in my success in graduate school. They keep me focused so that I can actualize on my potential. For instance, I have never been very organized. I have always been the kind that flies by the seat of my pants. My mentors, though, encourage me to become more organized. They encourage me to plan. They encourage me to look at where I have to go, where I am currently headed, and how I will get there. They guide me to look at the big picture versus just looking at the here and now. They help by getting to know me and helping me plan to accomplish my goals. I guess it is like the old saying goes, 'If you put something in writing, then it will happen,' versus just thinking it and it never happens. They propel you and push you to plan so that you will be successful.”

“Writing a dissertation or co-authoring research projects requires help and my mentor has been a great guide. My doctoral program is in advertising and my goal is to get a faculty position in my home country. Publishing is very important. Approval of faculty is essential to getting my publication written and submitted. So, faculty are very important in my life. You need to be on the good side of those with similar research interests. My professor and I developed my idea and collected data together and we did the whole process together. She supported me along the way and served as a great mentor. She helps me get through everything. She manages my schedule and checks everything. Since I just had a baby, it is very difficult to manage, but she pushes me to finish. This really forced me to examine fundamental assumptions about my approach to doing research, the way I approached graduate work, the way I formulated my ideas, and

how I articulated them on papers I submitted. Another professor opened my mind to what it is to be a scientist and the philosophy of science; that was a lot of fun. I learned about unspoken assumptions that I did not realize about my thinking. There are professors who are willing to help me and those who ignore me. Only a few professors really cared about me. One was a great professor. Unfortunately, he retired. He encouraged me to work hard and think for myself. Many of my other professors have personal agendas. Half of the time they are not even prepared to teach class. They just show up and talk about their interests. Some professors are great mentors, but others are frustrating. Sometimes I do not feel empowered. Instead, sometimes I feel that they are not interested and want nothing to do with you. I guess you have to compromise your integrity and beliefs in order to get through your dissertation. You have to do whatever it takes or whatever your professors want you to do.”

I would not be where I am without my mentor in California. He was my advisor when I went through my Master’s program. He is one of the few people in my life who believes in my potential. We met during my senior year because of how the scholarship program was structured. A student scholar teamed up with a professor and did research under his or her supervision. The inception of our relationship was mentor/mentee. He is a beloved and loving older educator who teaches and promotes agape. We had three faculty members in the program, but all of the students only wanted to go to him for advice. We all like to affectionately call him professor. They are very caring and motivating. In my farewell speech during our graduation ceremony, I jokingly said, but meant it wholeheartedly, that my professor is a martial-arts grand-master because he

kicks ass without lifting his foot. He has the influence to make you want to work hard and feel guilty when you are not living up to his standards. Along with many other fellow students, I worked three jobs, carried a full-load in school, and went through the ups and downs in life. Professor was the one who picked me up when I was down, dusted me off, counseled me, and sent me back on track. Unfortunately, I do not get this type of support here. An involved faculty member is not only a mentor, but a friend. Many faculty members are obligated to mentor students as part of their job requirements, while others are mentors who foster friendship and support. Only a few faculty here provide a nurturing relationship. I have heard students at different graduate schools talk about faculty who stop students from succeeding and serve as obstacles instead of catalysts. My advisor is my mentor. He offers personal experience and academic feedback. I have had a positive human relationship with him. Initially, when I arrived here, I felt distant from the faculty, even slightly afraid of them. With an upside there is a downside. Many of the faculty have really tried to make the graduate experience everything it could possibly be. Overall, I have had phenomenal professors who have embraced the mentorship role.”

**When I visited and met the faculty members in the program I was inspired.** Faculty often serve as *motivators and encouragers*. “The faculty member who recruited me was highly encouraging. He was one of the main reasons why I decided to come to the university. The faculty motivated me to continue with a goal I had set for myself. The professors are so highly regarded in the field that their contacts have a significant impact in this specialty. The faculty seeded my passion for what I am studying. I knew what I wanted to do, but hearing new experiences of my professors and reading their research

has really confirmed for me what I will do in my life. My professors have all been leaders in the field. Witnessing their conviction has inspired me to do the same. The faculty are really the heart of your experience, whether it is good or bad, worthwhile or not. Certainly meeting the faculty ahead of time was what convinced me to come to this program. So, in terms of faculty impact, yes, the faculty had a great deal of impact in terms of encouraging me to come here.”

“The faculty that I have encountered have been the most generous and caring that I have ever met. Perhaps, due to the unique nature of our renowned executive cohort program in a very specific career path, there is a sense that the faculty is completely dedicated either as practitioners or previous graduates. Our cohort is spoiled. I hate to say it, but it is true; I feel totally spoiled. I had previously been in the same type of doctoral program, a cohort model from an institution in another state. The key difference is that this program is student-centered and executive-focused. The professors are caring and compassionate. There is a humanism about the educational process that I did not find in my previous program. These faculty members not only want to see you succeed academically, but they also want you to be a success as a person and as a human being. Most of the assignments we have in our first year are focused towards that end. Several faculty members have become direct mentors in my life, almost on the verge of friendship. My committee chair is in her sixties, but she is very much like a big sister to me in terms of helping me get through the program and helping me get my committee set up. I am now preparing for my comprehensive exams. She and I just had another meeting today. We get coffee all the time. We chat about what is going on in our lives. She breaks

in to explain what I need to do to prepare for my comprehensive exams. I am impressed and relieved to know that support is there from faculty. I did my master's at Illinois and faculty members were not as involved by nature with our studies. They were there, but they were more concerned with their doctoral students. Now that I am here, I am excited to see how interested they get in our research. Faculty members encourage students to hunt for jobs and get internships. They help us plan for our future. Getting direction, support, and encouragement is important in graduate school. Faculty get you more focused so that you can actualize on your potential. The doctoral program faculty are more concerned with your future than professors in my master's degree program where they help to push you through the program. Faculty do not go out of their way really, unless you go to them. They will help you, but you have to want to get your Ph.D. enough to seek the help.”

“Once you show your commitment and ask for help, faculty take the time to help you. My mentor is a loving superior to not only his students, but many junior faculty members as well. He has mysterious ways to get you working, and working hard. He is motivational and encouraging. He never raises his voice. You feel hurt when you know that you have let him down. In addition, he is resourceful, well-connected, and well-respected in the field. He advocates for his students on a daily-basis. When he comes across things that are helpful to you, he sends them your way. He has really good instincts. All of his star students are successful professionals and distinguished professors who never refuse to help whenever he approaches them. I was his graduate assistant for two years. My mentor helps students who need help. His wife volunteers her time; she is

not on the payroll. He groomed me to be a better writer, a better presenter, and of course, a better counselor. He opened doors for me by nominating me as a candidate for a scholarship, publishing with me, and introducing me to professors in other universities. He is a true helping professional and I am blessed to be tucked under his wings.”

“My mentor is practical and supportive with everything. I can call and ask questions like: When I do this presentation? Do I wear a suit? Can I just look nice? Am I supposed to bring food? Am I not supposed to bring food? Can I use this author because he is not very popular, but I love what he says? How many pages do I write? How much can I get away with in making this argument? Will you sign this form? Can you tell me how to get my IRB application completed? Can you give me feedback on my paper? Can you give me an idea of someone I can look up at library who knows an author who has written about this sort of thing? She explains everything. She often suggests that I come back in two or three days and let her know what I think. I ask her how I can make the paper really good within a couple of days. She calls me back on my cell phone as soon as I call. She makes sure I am not upset. She encourages me by saying that she really likes my work. I have a lot of questions and she is the perfect mentor; I appreciate that. Another supportive professor is an advisor for a student group in which I am the president. He supported me in attending a conference and meeting faculty from other schools. At that meeting, a professor from another university invited me to go to the presidential reception at an association in New York. That was exciting! My interest is in researching women in computing, since I teach computer science. Through this pursuit, faculty have encouraged me to write papers on that topic. My professors want to see me



succeed and they are willing to offer me financial support while also helping me navigate my field and the doctoral process.”

“As a graduate student you can practically be a slave to the faculty. Faculty hold a lot of leverage over your head. Working with a faculty member can make you or break you as a doctoral student. They can help you through the political maze or they can stop you at any point. They can make manipulating the system easier or harder. I am certainly aware that I am subservient as a student in this Ph.D. program. This is a big shift from the administrative positions I held when I was managing a lot of people. Faculty impact is hard for me to relate to because of the change in roles and my ability to adapt to being a subordinate. I do not feel that faculty has much of a positive impact on me. I keep a research journal, but I do not see that as impacting me. I am in graduate school for myself, not the faculty. I am like a duck; water just rolls off of my back. Or in Texas, I am an armadillo. Nothing can pierce my armor.”

**Trust is the main ingredient needed in an effective dissertation committee.** Faculty sometimes serve as thesis and dissertation *committee members*. “One of the roles faculty play is serving on dissertation committees. You rely on their advice in developing your research and writing your dissertation. They help you clarify what you want to study and focus on a specific topic. Unfortunately, not all dissertation committee experiences are obliging. Faculty may agree with what you want to study, but some will not agree with how you approach the topic. When you are finished, they may also not agree with your writing and procedure. My advisor is the chairperson of my dissertation committee. He has a great personality. He is also very smart. The relationship between he and I is

more like relationships I have with my family. It is more than a student-professor relationship. He influences me as a person as well as a professor with his knowledge and wisdom.”

“My committee chair passed away suddenly. That had a huge impact on the entire experience because it changed everything. If your major professor dies, you have a problem because nobody wants to pick up where they left off. That is what I mean by the faculty impact. It is essential to build relationships with faculty throughout graduate school because you never know when you will need a new committee member. I am undergoing physical rehabilitation at the same location as a professor who said he would be on my committee. He had a knee replacement. One of the other department’s chairs just underwent chemo-therapy. That is another person I have been in touch with for my committee. There is more office politics than I ever thought in terms of who you pick for your committee. What makes it even harder is finding people with like backgrounds and those with whom you have a good rapport. For instance, the chairperson in my field has been ill. I do not know if he will be around throughout my process, but he has demonstrated the most interest in my topic. When I took a class from him, though, I did not like how he taught the class. There is one committee member I would like to replace, but the new faculty member I would like cannot be my chair because of his lower rank and the lack of respect he might receive from other committee members.”

**Faculty members help students conduct academic research.** Many faculty members are also *researchers*. “The faculty have all done this before and they understand the research process. Writing a dissertation or co-authoring research projects requires

help so students need to be on the good side of faculty with similar research interests. They understand various methodological approaches that may work well for your research. They can help you gain recognition for your work, find a conference to present your ideas, or put together a paper for a journal. Faculty know the ins and outs of the experience. They can provide information on research deadlines and help you get university approval to use human subjects. Learning about research is all about stretching academically to turn in a good product and be critical about the work you do. Research is one aspect of the learning process. One professor and I hit it off right at the start. We had some common academic interests that prompted me to start the Ph.D. program. He was a hard-nosed theoretician and scientist. This professor insisted that his students become more rigorous in their approach to research and disciplined in how they formulated theories. He really forced me to think about what it means to be a research scientist. Other professors did take an interest as far as research and meeting with me, but I do not think their impact at the doctoral level was as thorough.”

“As a master’s student in microbiology, I was shut out of lab positions. The one lab in which I wanted to work in was full and I could not get a lab position in any other lab because the tier system dictates that microbiology is underneath molecular biology. So microbiology students have fourth or fifth choice of labs. When I switched to science education, I received the exact opposite treatment. When I went for my interview to switch majors, my advisor was welcoming. He really wanted me in the program. He was very open. Since I began this program there has not been a single faculty member who has not been supportive and helpful in making sure that I am properly advised. It is the

exact opposite experience from where I started. Overall, my experience with faculty has been very positive. You meet professors in the classroom, start relationships, and get the opportunity to develop those relationships. That is how I got my first GRA (graduate research associate) position. That is also how I have gotten involved in at least three separate research projects. Faculty impact is the development and intensity of student-faculty relationships so that faculty can see the student you are and they can suggest future opportunities. I also value the way in which my relationship with particular faculty members has developed through those experiences. Faculty impact is pretty huge not only in the classroom and on research projects, but also on a day to day basis. Faculty steer you and provide opportunities. When you work on their research, they provide opportunities to validate the work you are doing. They help you get your short-term job while you are in school. That will have an enormous affect on your career. The faculty shape the graduate experience. The kind of work you are allowed to do and the long term spectrum of your graduate experience becomes kind of a growth tree.”

“The faculty have made a huge impact on my graduate research experience. In one case, there was a professor with whom I took two courses; they were harder than hell and I busted my ass. Out of that experience, I was offered a chance to quit my full time position and do a graduate research assistantship, which had an enormous impact. That has helped me go from a person who was working full time while attending grad school, to a life surrounding grad school. Over the last year, this professor has passed on knowledge about research, shared insights into the field, allowed me to be on a research team, and has simply mentored me. During his class last spring and during the summer

afterwards, I began to formalize interest in possibly pursuing the faculty route. He has been an amazing part of that process. There is also an amazing woman from my master's degree program, who I look up to and continue, to this day to remain in contact with. She has greatly impacted my life and professional development. Having a combination of both ends will help as I plan to move forward in the future and have both practitioner-based and research-based experiences. Every part of my life is school and research. Out of my research assistantship, I have been able to work more closely with faculty. Now, I have not yet gotten publication experience, but that will be the next step. I am hungry for that."

"Originally, I went to a state school where the faculty primarily teaches; their focus is not research. That affects you because if you chose to do a Ph.D., as I did, you do not begin to write for journals until you hit the Ph.D. program and then they expect you to know the journal writing process. That had a big impact; it was a crash course. There should be a book that provides instruction on writing for journals. That would definitely help. If the faculty produced this book or manual, it would have a huge impact on future students. Plugging along, you continue to learn new things about how to conduct good research and you just keep going. I am working on a couple of projects for my research apprenticeship class. While I have met with faculty, I wish they would give me a little bit more input on the design of my projects. So, in terms of faculty impact, yes, the faculty had a great deal of impact in terms of getting me here. Now that I am here, I am looking for more direction - more specific guidance. It is not that I do not have access to the mentors, but I need more help with my research. They are always more than willing to

meet with me, but I could use some specific guidance in terms of the research design I am working on right now so I have had to go outside the department. I just met with a professor in the sociology department who is going to help me write some journal articles. He introduced me to some quantitative datasets. He is going to help me get a quantitative paper outlined and written. I am very appreciative that he is willing to do that because he has written fifty articles. For him to take time with me and I am not even in his department is amazing.”

**My professor gave me the opportunity to spread my wings.** Graduate school faculty are *networkers* to show students how to build relationships while they are in school. “My professor taught me how to network and build relationships. The faculty have been instrumental in providing opportunities for students to transition from the academic realm to the professional world. I was trying to figure out what I have to do, where I go, who I see, and it has not come easily. By building bridges with faculty and developing positive relationships, graduate students can go back to faculty for references and also for guidance and career suggestions so that we can advance through our career. I plan to go back to my professors, discuss my plans, and maybe work with them on a project in the future. Advisors and mentors are also in a position to help you after graduation and putting you in touch with people. I had a faculty member approach me about a job. Although I found the opportunity interesting and we talked about making a move, I was not willing to take the position because of the travel required. Nonetheless, the opportunity was there.”

**If I have a question and they do not know the answer, faculty put me in touch with the appropriate resource.** Faculty offer varying degrees of *accessibility*. “Faculty have been very accessible to me. Those outside my program have also been available when I had a question. Even when their enrollment was restricted and I was not one of their students, they have allowed me to enroll and participate as if I were one of them. I would not say my experience in graduate school is negative, although the stress is overwhelming sometimes. Yet, the academics and dialogue between my colleagues and faculty have been positive experiences. The role faculty play has been critical for my experience as a graduate student. I heard horror stories before I started my doctoral program. Friends at other institutions talked about how negative faculty were. I have not had that experience with any of my professors. In my program, we get to know faculty as part of the admission process. We actually interview with each faculty member in our program. Once we are admitted, we come in having already had an established relationship with the principal faculty members. That really helps. We are also in contact with the core faculty during the summer. Those relationships with faculty are developed very quickly and quite intentionally too, because our experience is both inside and outside of the classroom. You are assigned an advisor within the department and you get to know them very well. We also have lots of social interactions with faculty outside of class and outside the college. On a personal level, I have developed a very strong relationship with the faculty. That translates into the coursework as well. You become friends with your faculty members. There is a working relationship that is enhanced. You want to step up and do the highest quality of work possible for them.”

“I could imagine where a faculty member did not have their heart in the place to help the students. That might be very difficult. There might also be a case where you could not reach a faculty member either by telephone or e-mail. That would be very discouraging. Whenever a faculty member is gone for a long time or I cannot get a hold of them, it is only a problem if there is a deadline. On the positive side, there are professors who have truly been very generous with their time. I have not had a negative experience. My advisor lived in my neighborhood for a long time so I knew him before I even came to graduate school. We already had a relationship and he was good about giving advice, helping me out, and doing whatever it took. We had an ‘outside of school’ relationship as well and I really have not had that with anybody else. When he died this year, it really messed me up. As far as the cohort, it was great. The cohort professors were always accessible and the students worked together. Students take classes together and go through the entire process together as a group for the first year. The program was really good for the first three years, but in the fourth year, after we finished up everything, I was really on my own. I felt like I had lost my connections.”

“My advisor is great and is always available, but he is in the phase for retirement. This means that, despite the close relationship I have built, he may not be on the faculty when I defend. This is really tough because I am the closest to him. One of the other faculty members came over from administration so he can take a couple of students, but he still has other administrative obligations. Some of the other professors within the department are adjunct faculty or lecturers. It has been somewhat of a challenge to actually get the support needed to complete the program, so access is in some ways



restricted. The faculty with whom I have worked have been crucial to my success and have significantly impacted my life. When I get to meet with them and talk about my situation they have been very, very good. They are well prepared, good scholars, although they are, sometimes demanding. That motivates me to give my best. If I have a question and they do not know the answer, they give me a contact number and e-mail of someone who does know. The faculty are committed and pay attention to their students. They make the time. They concentrate on helping students so that they are successful and well prepared. There are several faculty members to whom I e-mail back and forth, and we have a good rapport. Their availability defines the graduate student experience. I would characterize my interaction with the faculty as positive and regular. The more well-known the professor and the more research they do, the more they are in demand for speaking engagements and research projects. Students want to work with these faculty members to help their career take off, but they must take the initiative, because these faculty are very busy. A few disempowering faculty members act as if they are too busy and are never available. They make me feel like I am on my own and being on your own is very difficult in the doctoral process.”

“The more well-known the professor and the more research they do, the more they are in demand for speaking engagements and research projects. Students want to work with these faculty members to help their career take off, but they must take the initiative, because these faculty are very busy. Faculty are approachable, both inside and outside the classroom. If I have an issue or a problem I feel like I could go to any faculty member and talk to them. I am also confident that they will not talk to anybody else about

my situation. What I have found to be the best way to get faculty on my side is to be very involved and engaged in the material they present in their courses. To do that I must stay on top of both the required and suggested readings and so I can participate in class discussions. That also helps to build a relationship.”

### Life Management

Life Management describes the personal life of a graduate student and the way they balance responsibilities, activities, and social life with their continuing education. Graduate students have numerous considerations that are not solely related to coursework. Life Management includes the subaffinities: time management, academic deadlines/responsibilities, managing finances, home life, commuting, family, friends, relaxation, work time management and academic deadlines/responsibilities.

**My schedule is just miserable.** *Time management* is one aspect of graduate school life. “And it just gets more and more miserable. So, as the semester goes on, I try and cram too much into one day. It would be nice if I did not have to work as much, but at the same time I get bored easily. My son has daycare center from eight to five. I try to make sure that time is set aside and then after that, I have to take care of my son. So I really only have eight to five, but I really want to make good use of the time to read. Life management has actually become more structured; I was never this structured. Scheduling allows me to get things done. I have a paper planner in my book bag, a year planner on the wall of my study, and an electronic calendar on my computer that prompts me with emails of things I need to do. I write everything down. I have a timetable to

complete my dissertation proposal and the dissertation. I am a visual person. I have to see all the things that I am supposed to do in order for me to plan. I am good at multi-tasking. In this program I have to juggle and jump through hoops in very short periods of time. The graduate experience has played a major role in structuring life for me. I must make sure that I am organized so that I get everything done while still having time for my family. In essence, I follow a pretty strict schedule. On another front, my sister's pregnancy is time consuming; she is due in two weeks. Therefore, I must manage my time so that I can see my first niece. I must make time and make sure that I have money set up for spending outside of the graduate experience and then I must make sure that I have money left. I learned to not wait until I had time, but start making time for these things. So it was a lesson in time management and scheduling where you try to give quality time and effort to the numerous areas of your life so that nothing gets discounted. I have a difficult time just with time management in general. I just have to make sure all the bases are covered."

"Most of the time I have weekends, but in the last month of school I work ten hours a day on the weekends and my demeanor becomes more serious. My nature and my training in my former profession make me a planner. I schedule, plan, balance time and money. As far as family relationships, it is twofold. My blood relatives are not supportive, which is an understatement. As far as other relationships, I am in a personal relationship that is loving and supportive. This helps me put up with the frustrations I have experienced and has made the hurdles acceptable. I have gotten a lot better at planning. I would not say I am better at scheduling, but I will say I am better at planning.

I walk on a tightrope, very carefully. My schedule dominates me. First, it is school and then it is work; I am last. I am happy to have a great support system from work. I try to set aside blocks of time where I do things that come up, but as far as scheduling, no, I just try to take whatever extra time I have to do whatever I have to do. Once again, it goes back to sleep. Normally, late at night is when stuff gets done. When it gets really quiet, late at night, I can read, or write...that sort of thing. Early, early in the morning works too. So, it is sleep that suffers more than anything else.”

“Scheduling is mandatory because I have four children and I have a husband to feed. It is imperative that my life is organized with certain days and certain times for things. Sometimes I say that my life is not my own. There are certain times of the year when work is busy, school is busy, and life management is less about management and more about just holding on for dear life. It is very difficult to manage time with this program. I work Monday through Thursday. Friday evenings, Saturday and Sunday, I study for my Ph.D. work. So, in short, I do not get a day off in the week. There are times when I am up until 2 o’clock in the morning to do assignments. Managing my time has been very difficult. As far as my outside social relationships, I try not to let graduate school interfere. My personal relationships are very important to me, but it has taken a lot of effort on my part to make that happen. It has been a struggle; the way I look at it, this is just short-term. When I graduate I will be able to go back to living a normal life again. You have to go through that struggle if you want to make the connections in the graduate school and do well in graduate school. Actually, I feel like I am pretty good at time management, especially for a graduate student who has a family. With only two or three

classes per week, the rest of my time is 'free time', but during 'free time' there is homework, papers, reading, research, and data collection for my research interests. I have a tight schedule. I end up having to almost look at every minute. I see Fridays as the only day I have time to lay back and relax for a couple of minutes. Scheduling my time is major in graduate school because it impacts life so much. So, time management at home is, for me, about making lists and using a scheduling program for what has to be done for the week. Then, I must prioritize from the most important things to the least important thing."

"Scheduling is a very delicate process, to say the least, because there are only so many hours in a day. The days do not get longer, they get shorter. I am obsessive compulsive. I make lists for everything in order to manage my time. Unfortunately, because I work more than forty hours per week and the classes are at night I make lists of things I have to do at work and things I have to do for school. On the weekends, I have to-do lists for shopping and to-do lists for classes. It is a little bit ridiculous, but it helps. If I did not have lists I would not be able to achieve everything I need to get done. It is a good reminder system. Otherwise, I would not be able to function. If I see a list with all the things to do, I want to cross them out. So, I will have a calendar for my schedule and a list for my tasks. My schedule is very busy. For instance, on Monday's and Wednesday's, I am in class all day, well, not all day, but probably 9:00 till 4:00. There is just not a lot of time to do anything on those days. So, some days, after class, I try to do whatever I can, like writing, reading, or whatever. But, frankly, most times I am already so brain-dead that if I do read something it is not going to stick anyway. Then, on

Tuesday's, I try to wrap up whatever I had from Monday that I did not wrap up, particularly the reading, writing, and organizing. I need to finish this on Tuesday night, for Wednesday's classes. Then, after Wednesday's class, normally I try to wrap whatever I must finish and then I drive three hours north where I work. Normally, on Thursday's and Friday's I substitute teach, so that does not leave a lot of time. On most days I think that I can maybe take one of my assignments to class and read, but that never happens because on the days I teach classes, it is so chaotic and crazy. I am always organizing my lecture, instructing, or managing the class. When I get home from subbing, I sit down, stop talking, and do my work. I try to read a little bit, try to write a little bit, try to do whatever and it never happens because there is always something else to do."

"At this point, I do not take any classes, because I am writing my dissertation. Because I live by myself, my schedule is quite flexible. So, I can wake up whenever I want and I can go to bed whenever I want. I am not sure that is good, but I know that this will not last forever. For the time being, I enjoy this flexibility, because I will never get this flexibility in the rest of my life. Schedule? I do not see that as being that different for me here in graduate school. While my life at this moment has more leeway since I am writing my dissertation, I have always tended to be a very scheduled person and goal-oriented. That just comes from a career in accounting. So, I do not really see that the scheduling has changed much since I came here. I respect my time in school. For the past few years, I have attended classes and completed what was required; actually, there is plenty of time. I just have to remain organized. Sometimes it feels like I do not have a life, in graduate school, so there is not one to manage, but it is hard. To answer that

seriously, I would say that I have to remember to keep a life outside of graduate school and keep my other relationships up because I need more in my life than just graduate school. So, in order to finish my dissertation, I have to do a lot of time management.”

**If you are a serious student like I think I am, you can become consumed by your studies.** The life of a graduate student includes *academic deadlines and responsibilities*. “You want to do well in your classes, and that is important, but sometimes you lose balance in your life in terms of keeping yourself physically healthy, doing things recreationally, cultivating relationships outside of the program and the graduate school. Unless you really concentrate, life outside of academics can fall by the wayside. I am on an accelerated schedule to graduate. In other words, I am about to finish a four- to six-year program in three years. It is hard work. My long hours of studying, writing papers, researching, and preparing for lectures is going to pay off in early completion and in the side-effects of poor health, and loneliness. To be honest with you, when I met my first professor at the beginning of my program, I had no clue what I was doing in the class. I have education leave which means I must take additional hours for classes and homework, but there have been issues and I ended up having to use vacation time this semester. I work through lunch every day so that I can attend class. Those who have a doctorate understand the process and are supportive. The ones who are less understanding are those who think I can just go to class on the weekend and at night. They do not understand the process. It is frustrating in that regard, but in the end, it will all be worth it. Part of the program also requires traveling for research and observation. Other parts include managing those guest lecturers who come to the university to give

presentations to our cohort; the graduate school class coordinates their trip and their time while they are in town. I never knew I could pack so much in to the hours I have. That is just within school.”

“The reason why I did not do the readings I should have read or I did not come into school early enough is because of work and family life. It weighs on my head a lot and I think it probably keeps me more irritable than I should be, especially when papers and deadlines start coming due and I feel more of the stress. It is not only the fact that there is a looming research paper deadline, but then I start beating myself up again. It is a vicious cycle that I have not been able to break out of even though I know it is a horrible habit. I am having a difficult time with the time management because of academic time commitments versus the time commitments for family life. It is hard to manage since my husband is also a doctoral student. So, our schedules have us missing each other. Scheduling has been dicey for me. It has been hard. There have been a lot of classes I wanted to take, but could not take because of scheduling issues. There was a methodology course I wanted to take that met Tuesday and Thursday right up to 4 o’clock which butted up against another course I was taking in the communications building that met Tuesday at 4 o’clock or at 6 o’clock. There was no way that I could get across campus in enough time. Since I could not sprint 300 or 400 hundred yards in time to get here, I had to miss out on a class that I really wanted. I have not been as effective at scheduling my time at home, but I wish that I could be and that has made for some interesting situations. I beat myself up about that because I know I should be using my time more effectively but there are so many distractions at home. My husband is



understanding, but there is still so much to do between the two of us. He is working on his dissertation. He wants to focus on his education, so I have to figure out my schedule based upon his. This means that I have lots of work to get done and some sacrifices to be made. My career and academic aspirations are kind of on the back burner squeezed in as they can until he finishes. Outside of work, I still have to study. When I come to work there are distractions in the office. It is hard for me to find a comfortable place to do my reading and writing assignments. So, I actually work better when I am at home. It is just hard to work at home so scheduling my time has been tough and I do not feel like I have done as good a job as I should have.”

“When I started in January, I was a new student and I was in the last group to register. In our department, one staff member was just wonderful in helping me register and getting me in; that was not an issue. In most cases, I am pretty good at scheduling my courses. Given that I want to finish and finish relatively quickly, it makes the scheduling of the courses, the scheduling of the work to be one of the major focuses. I keep working toward my planned graduation, but I sometimes have trouble fitting everything into the windows I have created. That pretty well drives the rest of my life for now. I have to get assistantships from my college, but my college has very few assistantships. To get the assistance, I must build relationships with my professors and other professors. In essence, my financial problems are tied to the relationships I form and those are tied to the time I have between all of my responsibilities. So, in essence, if those relationships are not formed, then that could contribute to larger financial problems. School work takes precedence. In other words, if I have a required trip, I have to go. If I have a required

paper, I do that first. Actually, life management is a big problem for me because I do not tend to do it correctly. I have a short attention span so I jump from place to place and that affects the way I manage my life. I tend to do a little bit of everything at the same time and not complete one thing before I do the next thing. That is a problem especially in grad school when I am trying to write a twenty page paper. All I do is write a half-page paper and then do something else and go back and write a half-page paper. It is a personality thing and it definitely affects my graduate experience.”

“Through the bulk of the program, I have had some income and that has been a tremendous support to me. With scheduling, there are classes three days a week, particularly this semester. This gives me a fair amount of time to keep up with the workload. I have found it quite manageable, even though at times it feels heavy. If I sat back and looked at it, being single, I am really blessed. I am in a much better position than some of my peers who, in addition to attending classes, still have to support a family. You will not get any complaints out of me about that. When I began, I took as many as fifteen hours of graduate school in one semester, but many of those classes did not actually have seat time. Some of those hours required internships or research. Recently, since I took a job working full time, I have only been able to take six hours a semester because school has a huge impact on my personal life. Each semester I try to figure it out so that I can manage my time wisely and still accomplish my overall goal.”

**Well, managing money is not difficult because I do not have any money to manage.** *Managing finances* is one thing graduate students consider. “I was half joking when I said about not having money to manage. The fact that I do not have to work right

now to support myself is a tremendous benefit so I can focus full time on my studies while I am here. That will not continue indefinitely because I have to take an unpaid leave of absence when my sabbatical ends to finish my program. Before I started, I paid my bills every month, but now I give up all kinds of luxuries my friends still get. I cannot believe it. I do not go to buy new clothes all the time anymore. There is not really any money. The money that comes in, goes out. As an employee on sabbatical, getting paid once a month, it is even harder than when I worked full time in the real world and I was paid every other week. That was an adjustment. Money is tight. I wonder where I would be right now if I had not gone to graduate school. Well, I would be making twice the amount of money I take in right now doing my job, but I would be making twice the money. That gets old, so I am glad that I will be done soon so that I can get back into taking care of myself financially.”

“As far as managing money, I work full-time at a community college. The only way that I am able to go to school is on financial aid. I was really happy that I got a scholarship, but that affects my financial aid. I wonder why I got a scholarship if that means that I get less money on financial aid. I do not really understand that rationale, but that is interesting. I was thrilled about the scholarship. Graduate school is more expensive than I forecasted, which is really scary when you consider that I am pretty good at estimating. There are some things that snuck up on me. So, managing money is something I must consider. Graduate school has cost me a fortune. Suffice it to say, I do okay salary wise, but it still takes a good portion of my income to come to school. Then gas is so high and I have an 8-cylinder truck that costs me \$50 to fill up. I fill up a few

times a week because of my commute. So, I spend more than hundred dollars a week just to drive of my truck. I also have a Sequoia which is also an 8-cylinder. That, too, costs about a hundred dollars a week. It all adds up. The textbooks, of course, are pricey. The gas, though, has been the biggest impact thus far. My wife works full time too and my in-laws live with us. Sometimes it can be a little tight, but all in all, the opportunity cost will be offset by the outcome. I can see that it will be beneficial. The expense forces me to want to complete my program. I cannot spend the next ten years of my life relishing the graduate experience. I need to graduate and get on with the rest of my life.”

“Money is a huge problem. I have no money. I have taken out twenty thousand dollars. I owe sixty five thousand from my education in New York. I had a situation for two months where the department did not realize that they did not allot enough funds to pay me for the last two months. I was literally broke. I charged my rent on my credit card and I had to take care of my little brother too on the side, so it has been difficult. Money is a huge factor. Scheduling is not a big deal because the courses I take are at night. That is not hard. What makes it hard is coming and getting motivated to come. Especially when a lot of graduate school requires sitting through bogus stuff and going home, thinking to myself that I could have just read that stuff at home. I could be at home studying or something. In terms of money, I am not a person who cares much for things. I am not much for getting my hair done and that kind of stuff so the money management has not been that big a deal for me. Of course, you get really creative in relation to managing money because there is no money and a twenty hour job does not even pay for educational costs; it is miniscule. Managing money is an effort in creativity. Graduate

school is a money sponge. Worse than that it is a time sponge and it soaks up all your extra time. It affects the amount of time I have to sleep. Some nights I only get three or four hours of sleep, which is not good. It affects my health; it has a cascading effect, like dominoes. Also I eat a lot of meals over at the university cafeteria because it saves money. It is really cheap, very inexpensive, and you can get a decent meal. I cannot eat junk food because I fall apart. I manage my money tightly.”

“Well, as far as money goes, I quit my job to come to this doctoral program. I have an advantage in that I am retired from another profession. My standard of living is not what it used to be, by more than a significant amount. As a student I do not spend much money, just on tuition, books, gas, and monthly rent. Actually, I never manage my financial status. Certainly, money has been impacted. My husband and I do not take vacations right now and we certainly do not go out and buy new cars and clothes. That is just a reality at this time. But I do feel we have learned to work on our relationship. My husband is supportive of the process. We look at it as a team effort and a sacrifice together. Unfortunately, a lot of money saved up was intended to last a lot longer than it lasted. I have a scholarship which helped tremendously. My son who is in college also threw a monkey wrench in everything by blowing all of his money. I had to come in and pick up all the slack. All of the stuff I had saved for my education wound up paying for most of his. We are having to renegotiate some of that, but it is happening and I will just have to go out and look for some financial aid to finish up the program. In the big picture of things, money is less important because there is a bigger purpose. Primarily money is a concern because there is always a cost. You must always pay money for something. You

always need more money. Given that I do not work, I have a certain amount of money budgeted for things. When new costs arise, everything else is thrown into chaos. Managing money is hard, but I just keep reminding myself that this is something I must complete to get to the level I want to be. So, regardless, I have to keep up.”

“Money is an issue, but I think it is for everyone. It is kind of expensive having a house here, in the states, and another house in Mexico and having bills over there and over here. Life in the states is more expensive, especially if you are paid in pesos. So, with the exchange rate, I lose a lot. My wife does not have another job, so she is trying to find a job in the mall or supermarket. So, yes, managing money has been an issue, but you have your rules and you respect your limits. I learned to manage money because my parents cut me off when I was 18. I got a scholarship to college which was wonderful and then I went on to the masters program and took out a lot of loans. I got a TA job which pays my tuition and gives me a \$1,000 a month. But that is only \$12,000 a year to live on. So managing money is hard and I am always behind. I have to wait for my paycheck to pay my bills. I pretty much had a lot of the same expenses for a long time. I have been living on a TA salary for 2 1/2 years now. I work in Mexico for extra money, but it is hard to manage. It is one of those things where you never have extra money, but you always want it because the thought of being able to go on a vacation or out to a nice dinner and things like that would be great. I just think about what I actually need to get through the average day or week or month. But it is difficult with books and tuition and all that stuff.”

“Most people would say that I do not have a life because I do not have money, I do not have family, and my schedule is a nightmare; I do have two dogs, but I do not have children. I am not married and I do not have a boyfriend. I am a single woman and I almost have a doctoral degree. Money is really tough, but as long as my dogs are fed and I get peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, it is okay. I find it remarkable for those parents who are willing to go to graduate school while taking care of a family, but I myself am paying with student loans while I work. If I were starving, if I have in emergency, my parents would help me. My parents help me a lot to get out of financial trouble. I do not know how much money school has cost; maybe sixty or seventy-thousand dollars, not counting my time. That has been a stress relief for me because I know if I get really into the trouble or, for example, my transmission is worn out I am okay. A few months ago, my car broke down and I had trouble getting to school. My parents helped me by replacing the transmission, which was very expensive. I joked with them they helped me so much in school, because they never had to pay for a wedding. So, in some ways I am very fortunate financially. I have friends who buy me lunch pretty frequently. I do what I can and I hold my breath in paying my bills. Managing money is hard, because I am on an unpaid leave of absence. I have basically given up about a year and a half worth of salary to be in graduate school. This just adds to the cost and it has made it a bit more difficult because I have had to give up my income. Learning to managing money is an issue, but when you have less of it you learn how to manage it better.”

“Honesty, I feel bad saying this because I hear so many people say they are broke, but money is not an issue for me. I am in the military and I am on active duty. I am being

paid as an officer to come here and get a degree. This is my job and this is all that I do. I get the same salary I would get if I were at an Air Force base somewhere else. As an officer, I make a good living. So, in terms of managing money, there is honestly nothing different between coming to school and serving in the military. In general, I must make sure I have enough money to pay the rent and keep gas in the cars. The way my wife and I manage is that as long as everything is paid for I do not worry, because I do not really want to have that extra burden. While I have borrowed some money for my schooling, I try not to waste it all. We manage it well and we both think it is a good investment. I am not spending much time stressing about money. The only difference now is that I have a bigger family because my daughter is a newcomer to our family. I am excellent at managing money, both in the job and personally. Learning about finance and also having this degree has allowed me to look at different ways of budgeting in a bureaucratic system and also in my own personal life.”

**You know, I do not even have cable TV.** Graduate students create a *home life* outside of the classroom to fit their particular needs. “Unfortunately or fortunately, I have become accustomed to this way of life. This is the first time in my life that I bought and wore a pair of flip-flops in public. Maybe summers as a child at our cabin in Minnesota, but for all intents and purposes, I am not a jeans and flip-flop kind of gal. I underwent a whole transformation from someone wearing suits six-days a week to someone whose weekends were spent on a boat in cut-offs, t-shirt, and flip-flops, with sun block on my nose and a floppy hat; it is a different way of life and probably healthier, too. As opposed to the workplace, you can be yourself at the university. While I appreciate the discipline



and structure of the Midwest, which I have kept, I now also have a sense that it is okay to be an individual. It is actually appreciated. People take their time. In Chicago, when you go into a store to buy something like at a department store or a liquor store, it is a five-minute hop. Here, when you buy something, people hold a conversation with you about your purchase. It is different. You spend ten-minutes talking about mangos and how ripe they are. People are proud of what they sell and what they do for a living, and they want to share their experiences with you. They want to engage you, which has been a nice change.”

“My roommate used to say that there are three components to graduate school: school, life, and social. If you work hard at one, you will probably lose the other two. You have to work hard at balancing everything, including the amount of time you spend with your friends, family and, co-workers. You do not get a lot of time with family; you do not spend much time at home. School takes a lot of time away from relationships that do not involve your peers in the program. There is no getting around it. I naturally tend to wait until the last minute to do things. So, when I have a lot of work to do, I have to force myself to manage everything. I barely made it back to my apartment. I picked up clothes and went to school. How well you handle multiple projects affects your ability to do anything extra outside of class. Balance is not quite the right word. I cannot see how one can balance. You are always in imbalance. What happened with me was that during my first year I got very much involved in graduate school and I got married. My home life changed considerably. New expectations at home altered my way of life. For my classes, I did all the readings and got as much out of class as possible. My husband had just

started to work, so he was very busy, too. It really did help. We managed. Both of us were busy. We lived in cities two hours apart. We saw each other on weekends. That did not affect my student life much. Things changed when we decided to have the baby. That really affected my graduate life. I was not managing my classes very well so I took a semester off. Returning now in spring semester I am discovering that, wow, this is really difficult. It was not a very pleasant surprise. I had to rethink how I managed my home, travel, family, and classes. I really had to cut down on all of the work.”

“I really do not manage life. It manages me. Managing stress at work, school, and home is easier said than done. Last Saturday, I got a massage. The masseuse told me that I have huge knots in the back of my neck. Managing home life is important to my overall mental and physical well being. Then, at school, if the faculty has a project they want me to complete, I stop what I am doing wherever I am and I work on that project. I do not see my family much. I may go home once a year maybe. Most of my family went to graduate school, but none of them got a Ph.D., so they do not really understand the intensity because the difficulty increases possibly ten times when you go from a master’s degree to a doctorate. So, they expect me to have as much free time as I had before when I was working on my master’s. That is just not possible. I really do not have time to manage anything outside of school because I go from one project to the next, one experience to the next. When I have a moment to stop and breathe, I consider that my chance to manage my life. I do not have the support of a spouse taking care of business at home. I have to personally take care of all the home matters and the bill paying and cleaning of the apartment. So, life management is tough. There are so many facets to coordinate:

school, work, home, family, and oftentimes friends I rarely even see anymore. I try to take one day a week off just to decompress. I try to work out five to six days a week because I do not want to lose my health due to stress. This doctoral program is stressful so I do try to do something for my body. Other than that, if I am not in school or working out, I am asleep.”

“In terms of life management, I had some rough spells in my life. One major one happened in high school. I had a lot of life issues going on at home. I had control issues with my parents. It became really rough and scary there for awhile. When I entered college, things smoothed out. I was going along okay. When I was in Illinois and getting ready to go into a Ph.D. program, I became overwhelmed. I felt alone, on my own, and freaked out. I became very depressed. When I finished my masters, I wondered if I were to go through four or more years of school, and when this would ever end. When I was done with my bachelor’s everything was fine. When I was done with my masters everything was fine. But, I was not sure if I could take four more years. Besides, this time I knew it would be even harder. Therefore, in order to manage my personal life, I created a regimented home structure because I am so busy. I divided my life into certain areas. On Saturday, I get up early, go to grocery store, clean the house, and then I do graduate school homework. On Sunday, I grade papers. So, I make sure that I do as much school work as possible on the weekends. During the week, I come home and relax and then I either grade papers or I do work for graduate school to get ahead so that I have less to do over the weekend. Very little time at home is spent in relaxing. Most of it is spent in working. I do not like to watch television and play around on the internet. I make sure I

complete all of my projects and that I put everything else in proper context. There are days when I hole myself up in a coffee shop if a paper is due. I simply have to put the time in and get the job done. Otherwise, I will be up late and do a crappy job. In order to manage my life I have tried to make it cyclic, an organized routine of work and school, school and work, each day is repeated. Cooking is my 'me' time; doing laundry is taking a break. I wish I could sleep more. Six hours will suffice for now. So life management is making sure my job performance is high, my students feel engaged and my homework is complete. I must make sure that I am progressing with coursework. If I can stay up with everything in my life, then I am doing okay."

"Life is like spinning plates. You have a lot of different plates spinning at the same time and you just have to keep them moving. Sometimes they wobble and sometimes they are spinning nicely and it just depends on how smoothly you are getting things done. The focus changes depending on what you need to do and the criticality of what is right in front of you. I make sure that every night, between 6 and 8 pm, I am putting the kids to bed, help with dinner, or do things like that to make sure that I am constantly engaged at home. I have been lucky this past year and a-half that I have been able to wake the kids up, make them breakfast, and that type of thing. I focus on particular, regular events so I do not drop out of my family life. Other than that, I am lucky that studying federal information policy is what I do for fun. So, coincidentally, in having no free time, I spend it all doing what I like to do anyway. Being in grad school is definitely about life management. Each semester, I set up a routine. On Monday nights, I do specific things and on Tuesday nights, something else. I make an organized system.

Obviously, there are times when I have to deviate, but I try not to do that very much. As a full time student, my life is surrounded by school, so life management became being a good student - everything else is secondary. This means that I must compartmentalize my life at home. While I care about my family and make sure they know I care about them, I also have lots of details to manage. My personal needs are often an after-thought. I have not bought a book to read for fun my whole time as a graduate student because I could be reading professional journals, academic books, and other writings in my field. Reading for fun is out. So, in effect, my commitment to learning what I need to know in my program is impeded, but that is not a complaint, it is just a state of being. I do not see how my readings and research impinge upon anything because I chose to do this. Graduate school was not something that was thrust upon me. Someone did not tell me that I had to do this and manage my personal life; this is what I chose to do so I am happy to do it morning, day, and night.”

“I have a different priority in my life now. I miss my mother, my mentor, and all my friends. I literally gave up my life to pursue my Ph.D.. It is a big price I pay to get here. I guess I am a true workaholic. What life? I do not have a life. I have not had a life for almost five years now. It started when I became a graduate student. I had three jobs and carried a full academic load - all work, no play. My entertainment was watching TV while I ate. I still had to shop for groceries and cook every so often for the girls. So, for me, managing my life at home is about trying to find time to de-stress and do things like cooking a healthy meal for myself and trying to find time to exercise and to take care of myself. My whole life has become about trying to find balance so that I can get the work

completed and not kill myself in the process. You just have to get the job done. As a woman, it is easier to be adaptable to changing circumstances, because women typically have to juggle so many things during the course of the day. We take care of emotional health of those around us while making sure the fridge is stocked. It comes naturally. I do not think it is something that you have to work at necessarily. Life management is trying to keep all of the balls in the air, as they say. It is trying to take care of professional obligations, research obligations, classroom obligations, teaching obligations, and then, other things like making sure you have paid the mortgage on time, your kids are taken care of, and you have dog food at home for your dog. Life management tasks before did not seem as challenging as they are in graduate school. Life management is an ongoing challenge in the graduate experience. Teaching was a lot easier in that respect. When I taught school, I left at 7:30 in the morning and came home at 3:30 pm; that was much easier. If you wanted to take your work home, you could do that. That would be your job and you would have a decent income. Going from a decent income to a limited income has been challenging to say the least. You get used to a certain lifestyle when you are fully employed and you sacrifice that. It changes how you manage your life, or at least how I manage my life. My life has taken a hit, but the challenge for me has been to manage coaching eight boot camps a week, being a TA for twenty hours a week, taking three classes, supporting my family, while still having time to study. It is very difficult to maintain any sort of life outside of school so any chance I get, I try and make things easier in terms of my sanity and keeping my house clean and doing gardening - things that are not school related. I find this helps me with my school work because I feel more

balanced if my life management is under control. Then I can do a better job of working and doing my research and writing.”

“Being older and managing various goals including the Ph.D., I want to be done, but also want to buy a house, earn money, and have a significant relationship. I put many of my goals to the side. It is tough to further delay goals that I have already delayed long enough. I made a decision when I decided to go back to graduate school that I was going to have to manage what I really wanted to do in my future. This means that I must do unrelated assignments and homework in order to build a skill set that I may or may not need for the future. I just need to do what is required. I do not know how I do it sometimes. Some things get sacrificed; I eat worse. Over the summer is when I take fewer classes and work slows down for me, I start to eat right again and workout on a regular basis. Ever since I was in high school, working out has been a big part of my life management. That is one of the first things that is sacrificed when I get busy. I do not handle it particularly well, but I would argue that when I am managing my life well, things tend to go better and my attitude is better about everything I am doing. Of course, when things go to crap, my life management fails. The graduate experience impacts my whole life. Whether it is family, money, or social relationships, it seems like I never have enough time; I never have enough money; I never have enough energy to tend to relationships like I did prior to graduate school. It just changes completely the way I relate to everyone.”

**Usually, I drive from work to the university and go to class until 10:00 pm; I do not get home until well after midnight.** *Commuting* to graduate school is part of the

experience for those who live far away. “That happens two nights a week. The other days classes end a little earlier. I have another job as a faculty member teaching government. Most of the time, my kids are already asleep before I get home. I see my children a couple of days out of the week, if that. Outside of my home life, I hit the library, wash the car, mow the lawn, and do all of those other great things that are required at home. I do not see my wife much, which is very difficult and it has put a strain on our relationship, but this is my last semester of coursework if all goes well. I am convinced that it has to get better with time. Initially, I juggled a lot. I was commuting. I was engaged. I had family 150 miles away. I was not living here. I was working. The first semester I managed and made the grades, but emotionally I was not very good; on paper it all looked good. There was a lot of stress overall and, bit by bit, I recognized that in order for me to do this I needed to lighten the load, which involved making it easier on my spouse and my career. I was able to remove myself from a few responsibilities, but now I am starting to pile things back up again. I get overwhelmed as I try to juggle everything and freak out and drop as many things as necessary. It is very hectic commuting a few hours each way. I have children and also manage a house. I still have to cope with all this work from school, so I have learned to prioritize and plan my days when I am here at the university and my days when I am at home. It has been stressful, but manageable. On class days, when I must I drive two and a half hours each way three to four days a week, there is no time to study, read, or work on any scholarly pursuits. My class work has turned into a weekend thing. Life management is a challenge, although I think it is for every graduate student. It is also a sore spot, especially regarding family. I have two



young children, a fourteen month old and an eight year old. I do not get to see them much since I attend school full time and work full time and have been doing this for about three years. I take about three classes per semester and commute between my city and the university. My full time job usually requires at least fifty hours of my week with four to six hours on the road. That is fifty hours per week at a minimum. There are times when I get home and get a phone call from a staff member from my job in the middle of the night. I have just arrived home and they are asking for additional assistance. I stop what I am doing with my children, get on the computer, and satisfy the issue.”

“With the long commute, I have to be very conscious of my time and make sure I am getting sleep. I have the support of my spouse in this endeavor, thank goodness. He tries not to require large amounts of time. On the weekends, when I am not working or going to school, I study and prepare for schoolwork and projects for work. So, essentially, time has been the greatest challenge. I have been fortunate to be healthy during this time. We do not live in the large urban area where the university is located, so commuting from to work and to school while taking fifteen credit hours and working full time is a handful. The greatest challenge in my graduate work is life management, because I work full-time and I also have a part-time job. I have a family and kids at home. With work in one direction, school in another, and my home in another location, when I have special projects, I commute 1500 miles each week from home to work to school making a triangle in different directions. As for family, basically, I live different lives. Since commuting is sometimes overwhelming, part of the week I am in one city, part of the week at home, and part of the week at work to minimize the commute when I

have too much to do. While I try to do all of my school assignments at the university, there is still a great deal of homework left to do at home. It sometimes gets to be stressful because you have so much to do and it seems like there is just not enough time. My son is involved in T-ball and just finished basketball season. Last weekend we had opening day for T-ball and there was a parade with all kinds of activities. They were supposed to have an opening game, but they got rained out, so there is always something. During basketball season, every weekend there is a basketball game to watch. With all of my commuting, I try to make it to as many of my kid's events as possible."

**My family's thinking is to encourage me to sacrifice everything until I can get to this one stage where I can enjoy my life.** *Family* often influences the graduate experience. "While I know that my family wants the best for me, I realize that the higher up I have gotten academically or in my career, the lonelier I have gotten and the more of my life that has to be put on the side. So, in terms of being here, I am by myself. I live in my apartment with my daughter. I am beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel, but we have all paid the price. I do not get to go to my daughter's performances. She was doing dance for a little while and I did not get to go to her recitals. I went to one and that was it. She is now involved in soccer; her practices are on Monday nights. I do not get to go to that either because I have another obligation on Monday night."

"This weekend, I will write papers. I have two papers to write and two presentations coming up, so I have to work on those over the weekend. Sometimes I look forward to going out of town, but then have to cancel, because I have to stay and work on my school stuff. I talk to my parents, but they are not reliable. I talk to my brother and he

is very, very encouraging; he went to an Ivy League school, too. He went to graduate school and has a clear idea of what I am experiencing. In his case, he ended up returning to Iowa. Neither one of us had emotional support from our parents. My parents do not understand what a dissertation means. They do not understand the many facets of a doctoral program. They do not understand how scary it is. They do not know how much more political it is than an undergraduate or master's degree. I used to spend more time with my mother. I waited to begin graduate school until my daughter was in school and now I feel guilty every single day that I do not have enough time for her. Any time she does not do well in school, I think that it is because I am not around enough. I just take it on the chin for that. It is probably not that at all, but I just feel that being away and having so much work to do, double work, has me feeling that way. My parents get mad at me too, because every time I make a mistake, they blame me. When I was in New York, I was working for a professor. My mother encouraged me to stay and do a doctorate underneath her. I had a fellowship through an Ivy League school program where they agreed to pay for another master's degree to get an administration license. I turned it down. I had another professor offer me a job in the suburbs. But, I turned that down too. My parents knew I turned it down. I was thinking that my choices would provide me better opportunities in the long run. Every time I do not do what they think I should do, they tell me that it is my own fault and say that I should have taken that experience or opportunity. So, in terms of family, I feel very, very disconnected, but I am convinced that what I am doing is right."

“There is just always something, so it is hard to balance the needs of my family sometimes because I know I have this pressing work, this pressing paper, or something. There is always something, so in order to try to manage everything, you just do the best you can and sometimes there is just not enough time. Normally, something has to be sacrificed and most of the time that is sleep. I am fortunate where family is concerned. I have a very supportive family. My kids are supportive and I am in a stable relationship that is very supportive, also. Having family support is probably the most important element for me to go back to school. I waited a long time to go back to school and I never thought that I would be able to get into this program. I ended up in this university as part of my life journey. So having family support is really important. Even so, life management is difficult. Actually, my husband is also a doctoral student, so we have some financial problems, but I do not want to sacrifice my family for my academic license. I want to be with my child, so my life is very difficult. Another prime example of life management and family in graduate school happened Easter weekend. April is always a time in the semester right when things are starting to get busy and everything is due. My mom inevitably asks if I am coming home. Nine times out of ten I have to tell her that I am not. She does seem to understand all of the assignments that are due just after Easter. The same goes for Mother's Day. Sometimes Mother's Day falls right before the semester ends so everything is due. I cannot even think about coming home for Mother's Day. She has a hard time with this. I have been in graduate school long enough that she is starting to get the idea, but she has a hard time comprehending the rigors of graduate course work. This happens again over Thanksgiving weekend which is right

before fall final exams and projects. Both of my siblings live in town with their wives. This is very much more of a stress for me because the stressful experience is ten minutes away instead of a thousand miles away. So instead of ignoring phone calls, if I do not answer the phone, then they are at my house, knocking on the door. If they are having some sort of catastrophe, I am always the one they call to organize the family and make everything okay; everyone comes to me with their problems. So it is really hard for me to balance the family, the dogs and other animals and just everything.”

“When my sons and my husband and I went into this, we decided we could make this a group project as opposed to just me going to school and them being on the outside. That has drawn us much, much closer. The time we do have together we try to use very carefully. We enjoy one another and make sure the boys know they are loved. I spend a lot of time online with them when I am here at college and they are in the city we used to live in. We play games online, we talk via Internet; we do instant messaging. So, those are ways I try to manage my family life a little bit more. Although we are close, the hardest part about graduate school has been managing my family. My sons are young and it absolutely kills me every Sunday night to leave them. I have serious stress about summer because I know that I will be gone five days at a time and it will very difficult being away from them. Scheduling is also stressful. Whenever my children are out of school I feel that I need to be there. My schedule here at school and my classes do not always jive well with their schedule. My husband and I constantly think ahead about daycare and childcare and make sure we have taken care of that responsibility. Even so, my family has been very supportive. There is no lack of support. It is just managing the

time to be with my spouse and our three children; I always hope that I have not missed out on too much of their growing up. During the summers, with the exception of one summer where I completed independent work, I have really kept the summers for family. We take two to three week vacations during the summer. We also take a week during New Years to be away just as a family. So, I try to be intentional about some blocks of time with my family because my ongoing time with them during the week is pretty limited. Our two younger children play soccer and are on traveling teams. That forces us to be gone on weekends together and that has actually been good for us during the last couple of years. But it has been tough.”

“I needed him to help with things around the house. We fought in the evenings over who would get to use the computer. That does not happen so much anymore. My husband and son have made a huge step up to take over responsibilities. My husband works out of the house, so he takes care of much of the responsibilities. Our roles have not been very traditional from the beginning since before I was in graduate school. So it has not been too terribly bad. They have been very supportive and they know this is something I want to do. It is easier because I live in the same city as the university and I have not had to commute. It is very difficult to schedule anything. I often sacrifice personal time for school. Particularly with a child and working as a teaching assistant, you have to balance work with your family and with school. If your child is sick, you still have to do your homework and you still have to work. You could be up until 2:00 in the morning because your child is throwing up all over you, but you still have to finish the paper. You take a shower and you go back to writing. You just get it done. Life

management means having to make decisions about what I do on a daily basis to: take care of myself, take care of my kids and my husband, and take care of my school needs. Sometimes it means being able to let things go as well. At different times, I have to prioritize and reprioritize events. When I am with my kids, I need to make sure I spend time with them while making sure that I have left enough time to do schoolwork or to do reading. I might not be able to read until after they go to bed. I might do school work while they are watching television. I have to make sure I take care of them while I have them with me. I have to make sure I have time for myself, whether I am taking a stroll, exercising, or eating well. I have to make sure that I take care of myself. It is just like everything else; it is all interrelated. Definitely organizing my life is important. I make sure that I spend enough time with my family. The time that I have with my children is very precious, so I try to focus this time and nobody can take that away. I make time to be with my husband and I make sure that I have time to do my job well where I work and study and try to just keep the three balls up in the air and keep going. To add to that, part of that life management is delegating. I have delegated more things to my husband. Also, I delegated more things to my children to make them more responsible. If I tried to do it all I would be crazy by now. Delegating has really helped me manage everything.”

“The kids were almost gone when I started graduate school, so that was a big help, because I did not start before I was in my forties. Scheduling time is just unbelievable. You really do not have time for yourself. I use all of the time I have at the library and interfacing with faculty. Even if I did not have a job, I go to therapy eight or nine hours a week, so that is a killer, plus I teach a full load. It is not easy to manage my

schedule. I juggle twins, taekwondo, gymnastics, work; I seem to get sick all the time and you wonder why! I do not know if I manage my life correctly, but I do have some balance anyway. Oh yeah, I am married too! I cannot forget about him; that is terrible. We do not seem to have a lot of time to spend together but who does? In terms of managing my life at this point in time, it is the single largest task I have. I am taking fifteen hours and I am working full time. I have a son in college here in town and a daughter in high school. There is very little time for anything except for school, work, and family. My family is not even all in one place. They pull me in different directions. So if I spend time with my son here, my daughter is mad, because I am not spending it with her at home. Everybody is pulling on me, but it is a good thing. They are very supportive of me being in school and they appreciate the example that I am setting. It is all positive. I thank God for e-mail, particularly with my family. My spouse does not get along with one of my dissertation committee members. He had been in the program and this professor led him to quit. To some extent this has created some conflict, but not as much as might be expected. Nevertheless, I spend a great deal of time at the university, both for study and work. Luckily, he also works here full-time, so I do get to see him here and we do almost everything else together. My schedule-oriented life has time set aside for friends and family. As I partitioned my time, I decided that I wanted to hang out with my friends and family once a month, maybe on a Sunday. At the beginning of each semester, I am more balanced than at the end when I have more work. Toward the end, I tell my friends and family not to expect to hear from me for a month or so. My husband is understanding about housework, projects, errands, and my complete lack of sleep.”



“Fortunately, I have a very supportive family. They have supported me emotionally and financially. I moved halfway across the country to enroll in this program. I basically came out here with family support directly in the area. I uprooted my whole family and moved them here with me including my husband who left a business. Now, he is here working long distance managing a business. He followed me so that he could provide more support, be there for our kids, and help me manage everything that I was trying to do. My daughter is only three years old and she does not really understand why I have to work and cannot take the time to play with her whenever she walks through the door. That creates tension. I look to my husband to help deflect my daughter, because we both know that if my door is closed and we are both home my daughter will bang on the door and yell for mommy to come out. I try to carve out at least one weekend a month where I am with my family without any other responsibilities. My family picks up some of the slack. My husband is wonderful and he does pretty much all the housework for me. He takes care of the kids and makes sure they are fed and they are in bed. Sometimes I do not get home until ten thirty. He takes care of a lot of things that traditionally would be a female's role and especially a Mexican-American female's role. That is a cultural aspect but he has taken on responsibilities that in our culture would not seem to be accepted very well. He will get my degree with me. He is graduating with me as Mr. Mom. My parents are still back home cheering me on, supporting me, encouraging me, sending me checks when it was really needed it has been a great support to me. That helped alleviate some of the pressure and the stress. I feel like I have adjusted to the area. I have gotten to know my way around. That has not been a real stress point. I have a

younger sister who is dying of a brain tumor and that is a real distraction to me through this program. I have had to fly home a number of times because we were told that she was close to death. It has hindered me in terms of really trying to focus whole-heartedly on the program because that is constantly a distraction, constantly in the back of my mind. I want to be back there with her supporting my family. I have tried to do that as much as possible. So that would probably be the number one stress point in my life at this time, trying to balance keeping up with this program and staying focused while also dealing with that situation.”

“Family itself is a challenge. I am married; I have three children. There is more to manage than just the coursework. The overall program of study and requirements are demanding. Then, you have to manage relationships with cohort members. When you have a spouse or a significant other and children you have to continue to work on those relationships and you have to do it under the pressure cooker of a doctoral program. So, it is a challenge. What has made it possible for me to move through the program relatively quickly is that I have a good support system. I have a wife who understands the rigors of the time and the importance; she is supportive. I also have children. Two of my children are younger. They are five and seven. I have a son who is thirteen. The girls are young enough so that they do not know the difference. My scheduling is very important. If I did not manage school and work I would go insane. I have learned how to schedule my time and manage my money. Throughout this experience, I have learned to divide my time. With all of this, I have also kept my connectedness to my family. Before I entered the program, I spent a lot of time working anyway. I worked as the Dean of Students at a

junior college, sometimes fifteen hours a day. I probably have a lot more time to spend with them now, than I did working as an administrator. The more I think about the time commitment, in my doctoral studies, the more I realize that it is exceedingly difficult. I have a little more time to manage those responsibilities. But at the beginning of the program, the transition was tough, knowing that I was not putting in the time that was needed. When I think of life management, I think of managing the critical relationships with my spouse and my kids. My family is an important part of my life while I am in the program. For example, after we got out for spring break, I threw everyone in the van and we took a trip to the east coast. Even though I was tired and I probably could have done extra reading, I went ahead and took the trip. So, I try to involve the family so they will know I am still around and that I am still there. Family has been the greatest challenge for every person, but again, faculty explained this from the very beginning. Managing life outside the college, they told us, would be difficult, and it has been.”

“In my life, God comes first, my family second, and my studies and everything else comes third. My professors do not always know that. Life management is one of the most challenging aspects of graduate school. I have a family as well as a job as a graduate research assistant and I am a student. Those are three very big things I juggle. I am also a strong Christian and a very religious person. I must balance my dedication to my church, as well as my family, my books, and my organizations. Nevertheless, when an assignment is due, an assignment is due. My professors do not care about my priorities. Grad school feels restrictive, especially when I think back. One thing graduate school taught me was how much time I actually burn between getting off work and going back

to work. I regained some of that time when I got a graduate assistantship because I did not have to travel and I remained on campus. That piece of time cannot be regained. I figured, why not do something that would enhance my life and my children's lives? I returned to graduate school because it was something I had to go through in order to get where I wanted to be and do the things I wanted to do. I do not mind the short-term financial difficulty or intellectual toughness for whatever time this takes, even if it takes five years, because I still have the rest of my life. I have to know what is expected and what needs to be done so that I can set aside time to study and prepare things at home. Being a wife, I am depended upon more to take care of things at home. This takes planning and organizing on my part. Sometimes, I cannot study until midnight, when everyone is sleeping and it is quiet. I need to plan so that everyone is comfortable. I do not want to put them out of their comfort zone just because I decided to go to school. Sometimes I make sure they are in bed and I am up half the night so I can be successful in school. My mom is here and she helps me out. I can complain to her and she understands what I am going through. She went through it. That has been good. I am also lucky that I get to live with her. That takes away a lot of the financial burden of being a graduate student. But, you know, it is still hard. I work full time and go to school full time. I am at the end, so things are getting a little bit more hectic. It is pretty stressful. The days are long. When I get home late at night, I have more work to do. I think I cope relatively well. I do not know how much more I have in me. I am glad that I am at the end. My life is pretty good. Everything is manageable. I have been married the whole time since I began as a doctoral student. I have a wonderful partner and so that has been

fabulous. I do not know how people survive a doctoral program if they do not have a supportive partner who is willing to pick up the slack and do the day to day tasks that I cannot do because of my classes and assignments. I had a baby in August, so life management is of the utmost importance in the whole scheme of this period of my life. My child and my family have become a bigger priority now than completing an assignment. I am willing to risk the possibility of getting a grade that may have bothered me before, but mediocrity is fine now; I just need to move on and finish. Life management and graduate school go hand in hand more than anything else. My baby impacts everything now.”

“They say you are either married to your Ph.D. or your spouse, but sometimes it seems that I serve two masters. This has proven to be difficult. I realized that something had to give, so my marriage had to give. I have kids; I have a doctoral program. I had to put things in priority in my life and say, “I cannot do all of these things, so which ones can give for awhile?” My poor husband suffered. He is suffering. Life management is about managing those activities, commitments, and responsibilities, outside of the academic world. Those include relationships with friends I had before graduate school and I do not want to lose. It includes my husband, who is my best friend, as well as my health, home, job, and all of those things that defined my life before I started my doctoral program. But, in particular, my husband has been an amazing support system. He has paved the way so that I can accomplish everything required in school. He has supported me in every last possible way he could in order to help me get through this doctoral program. Certainly, the other area has been my health. I became very sick during my

doctoral program; I was diagnosed with a life-threatening disease. He made sure I went to the doctor when I had ‘more important things to do’. I told him that I would rather write my dissertation and work on my lit review rather than going to another doctor’s appointment. I even fought with him and said, ‘Look, I have got to get this in on time. This is more than important than going to the doctor.’ He said, ‘No, going to the doctor is more important than finishing your dissertation.’ He has been a stabilizing balance for me so that I could manage life while managing school. That is a big challenge for me. I have two kids living at home. I joke with people that my goal is to finish my Ph.D., not be divorced, and still know the names of my children. I had to miss my daughter’s play because of requirements at the university, so that is always a challenge. My husband has been very understanding. He was also going to graduate school for the first two years of my graduate experience. So, if I said, ‘I have to do homework,’ he would say, ‘Me too.’ He did not feel left out. That was a real blessing. Often your family does not really understand what you are dealing with here. Even if they are college educated, if they have not done the graduate school experience. They do not know how intense it is. They do not understand why you cannot be at the picnic all day long on Saturday when you need to be, for example, writing Chinese characters until they embed themselves into your brain and become automatic. They do not get it. You need to be able to juggle a lot. For example, when I first came here, I was living an hour south of the university. I woke up at four, went to the Greyhound bus station at five, and commuted on the Greyhound to the university. Then, to get a little bit of exercise, I took my books and my flashcards into the gym and rode the exercise bicycle as I flipped flashcards.”

“In terms of family, I pay special attention to our two daughters and communicating to them that, even though I am not there, they are very important to me. I call home a lot. I use my cell phone frequently. I keep tabs on them as much as possible. I know where they are most any time even though I am here and they are there. I have eased up on it a little bit because I know my husband takes good care of the kids. I kind of like to know where they are and I want them to know that I am thinking about them. On the evenings that I do not have class I try not to study. I try to sit with them, help them with their homework, and re-engage. That is only a couple of nights a week. But I try to re-engage with their work and what they are doing. I always walk them to school in the morning, even though it is about thirty minutes. We walk and I talk to their teachers; it is quality time. So I get up early. I get up about an hour before they do, so I have time to read before I start. I do an hour of reading in bed before I get up. Then I help them get ready, although they are pretty independent now, which is great. I love it because I can maybe do dishes or some quick laundry. Things pile up when you are not home. That is how we manage it. My husband is extremely supportive. He has a Ph.D. and he figures that if this is what I want to do then I deserve to do that, too. I did not put him through his degree. He had his when I married him. In terms of family, I just try to make that quality time. I know it is not a lot of time, but I ensure that I have quality time with the girls. I take my pets seriously, too. Whenever I am in the house, I have a cat sitting on my lap while I am typing at the computer. I spend a lot of time with my Labrador retriever. I take my pets for walks on the weekends. My family and pets are a lot to manage.”

“My mother lives two hours away and I realized last month that I had not seen her since Thanksgiving. We talk on the phone, but I do not have the time to see her. We have a two week rule where I try to get home every two weeks. That does not always happen, particularly at the end of the semester, but it is important to remain connected to my family because they always have been and will continue to be my greatest supporters. It sounds strange to say that I am going to spend a whole Saturday with the family as if they are, you know, another issue, but they actually are, because the next issue is to do a research paper or attend class. So, I am doing really well managing my time. I am an international student who came here and I got married when I was doing my master’s degree in computer science. It opened up my life. I keep my studies and career under control. My son was born last year. That was an accident. I did not mean to have a baby this early, but he is here. My life priority has changed. Before I became pregnant, my work and studies came first. Now, I need to balance these things. My son comes first. It is very hard to manage everything with a little one at home. That is a huge, huge challenge for me. Going to graduate school is difficult. There are things I cannot do with my son. For example, a group of students in my doctoral program wanted to go someplace for spring break. They were going on vacation and it was something that my husband and I could not do at this point in time. We must look for other creative ways to spend our time together.”

“Well life management, it is about juggling a lot of different things. Not only do I juggle my family, I juggle two jobs. I am the Vice President of an organization where I do all of their communications, marketing, technology, media relations, and community



relations. It is a really fun job. They have a lot of special events in the evenings so I can make up my forty hours by going to a few events every week and that is helpful. For instance, my schedule on Monday, Wednesday and Friday I go to work early in the morning, drive two hours to class in the middle of the day, drive two hours back to my second job at a college in my home town. I also have five office hours a week. Every other Saturday I teach classes; I teach four classes, the others are online at a private university. On Thursdays I drive to class and return back home about midnight. I usually have to drop off a friend that came with me so that adds time to the drive. On Wednesday I pack my bag and I spend the night at my parents' house, because they have my son. That way I do not have to wake him up. I pack a sleepover bag; we sleepover at grandmas on Thursday nights, because it is my long night and I do not want to wake him up in the middle of the night. This week, I had a class Tuesday evening that typically lasts until 7:00 pm. Last week, I told my instructor that I was going to have to leave early because my kindergartner was performing in a choir at his school. I made a decision that I was going to go see my son for his first choir performance in school and I went and did it. It ended up not just being choir, of course. We had a great PTA meeting prior to the choir performance. That was the moment I made the decision that my son was going to be a priority over my class. I made sure I let everyone know that I was going to leave, and then went and did my parental duty.”

“Because I live in a different state from my husband and we are both professionals, how we get together, how we spend our time is a factor. Also, we both have our own families. As far as family, since I do not live here and I have left my family

behind, it is very difficult. I am in a new place and live alone. I am used to living around a lot of people. It has been difficult to leave the family at home. I miss my dogs. It does create some tension with my spouse because I am not there to cook meals, take care of the house, and do all the things I have always done. To some extent, scheduling flights to see my family has been a difficult situation, but I feel very blessed in that I am out here as a full-time student. I am on a paid sabbatical from my college so I am still drawing income. I am a step-mother and a step-grandmother. How do I make sure they feel special in my life and that they know that they are special to me when I am so distant from them and not able to be there? That is a huge impact on family. I work very hard with everyone in my family. My mother went into the hospital two weeks before I was to propose. I was finishing up my comps and she wanted me to take her to the doctors for testing. I had to drop everything and go back to Ohio, but I was determined. This affinity is one of the most impactful of all the affinities. I will have been married for eighteen years on April 6<sup>th</sup>. No matter what you do, you have to work at it. With graduate school, I have made my family part of my graduate experience. I always make extra amends or find opportunities to contribute to the family, no matter how much work I have, understanding that, of course, I have to get things done at the graduate school. Even so, I make sure that I contribute to the family at all times. With my children, when it is their birthday, or something is coming up that is important in their lives, then that is the most important thing at that time. My children do not care about a paper that is due or a meeting I must attend. I am not saying that my children or my professors are not supportive; they have to be comfortable with what I am doing, but at the same time, I also

have to keep certain factors in mind. All of these things must be balanced, because they are each important at different times. When I am trying to balance everything, I am also trying to understand how I perceive my priorities. It has been difficult, but my goal is clear in my mind and I am going to reach that goal.”

**Facebook and videochat help me keep together my many sets of friendships.**

Students find ways to keep in touch with *friends* while in graduate school. “Even though I am consumed with graduate school, I continue to find a way to stay connected with all of my friends. I actually spent part of Easter video-chatting with my family and friends back home. My sister walked her laptop around so that I could say hello to everyone. Coming to this state put me literally 2600 miles from my family and friends. I might as well be studying abroad in Europe. In fact, that probably would make more sense. I try to get home every so often. Ever since I started graduate school, my personal life seems to be last, but I have a very helpful personal support system that does not make me feel like I am last and forgetting my own time. I have to make the sacrifice, but I must also take care of myself. I behave depending on my priorities. I have had to learn to give some things up. Also, I go to church. I joined the church choir last month and began participating in a Bible study with my friends. Maintaining outside relationships like at my church is important. Before I came to this city, I had become a lapsed Catholic. Coming here, I became bonded to my church, which has not happened in awhile. I enrolled in a golf lesson club. I am trying to think more positively to deal with problems better and go to church, the choir rehearsals, classes, yoga, and golf. Other important relationships include those with my roommates who are undergraduates in my program.

Maintaining those friendships are important to keep me grounded. I have to keep score and perspective. I have to keep everything in balance, including my personal life, family, and friends. I have to have at least a small life, even if it is not a big one outside of graduate school. I think graduate school really reduces how big that life is and how many people with whom I remain connected. I used to volunteer and do all kinds of things. Now, I can only go home once every six months and the time I spend with my friends is limited. It is a struggle to have a life. So if you ask about life management, I would have to say that graduate school makes it really challenging to have a life. A family friend whom I have known all my life passed away this semester. I wanted to go home and see folks. Being a grad student and being broke and busy, I had to call and say, 'My condolences go out to everybody. I love everybody, but I cannot show up.' I just could not miss a week. I cannot miss more than one or two classes for any reason."

"Regarding my friends and life management, they catch on but it hurts their feelings when I cannot go out and play or go to happy hour or spend a weekend camping or something like that because I have to stay in and type. I live by myself off campus about 20 minutes by car. The reason why I do not have a roommate is because I want my privacy. It is different from college, because graduate students need privacy. At home, mostly, I just rest and write papers. I also watch TV or movies or that kind of stuff. On the weekends I hang out with friends or other people. Yeah, life is simple, very simple and routine. So no new things happen; it is kind of boring. But I have to live with the boring life until I get my degree. I am away from my hometown, so I do not have family nearby, but somehow I rarely feel lonely, because I have a lot of friends, new friends,

friends from Korea, friends from my department. So, even if I am away from my hometown, I never felt lonely. With my particular friends, it is more just a matter of time because they do not have any money, either. It is not like they are asking to go skiing in Vail. I can see where that could be an issue, but not with my particular group...it is more about time. From a practical level, there are some pluses and minuses being single from what I hear from my married friends. On the one hand, nobody is upset that I stay at the library until midnight and study. Nobody asks me where I have you been or says, 'You are never home.' You need to be a multi-tasker in graduate school. Now I am single: no wife, no kids. By the way, I just found out that single means something different for me than it does for undergraduate. I thought I was single because I do not have a wife. According to them, I am single because I do not have a girlfriend, which means I am young and single and ready to mingle. That is what they say. Graduate school puts a tremendous stress on friendships. I have friends who have stuck with me and who forgive me for not spending time with them. Then, I have others where our relationship is slipping away. That is just part of the reality. Almost everything revolves around school and getting assignments done. Week by week I live in cycles that just keep pushing me forward so that I get my papers done. There are fortunately some balancing forces, such as my friends and my dog. I have a few, very strong friendships; that requires putting time into those relationships. So, sometimes it is tough, but I try to do it all."

**One of the most critical things I have learned is to set aside time alone for myself and make it sacred time.** Graduate students create a time for *relaxation* when they can, but often say they do not have any leisure time. "When I leave work or school

and go home, I do not know if I have to do something for my children, play a tennis match, make dinner, or I have a few minutes to just take a breath. A big part of the Ph.D. program is to make sure you not only schedule time for family and studying, but at some junctures, you have to have ‘my time’ that cannot be violated. This saves your sanity. I learned that the hard way, by the way. I do not have a life. I have spent all of my life trying to get ahead. I am an immigrant. My parents are immigrants. We were poor, so the focus has always been on education. I thought I had everything under control before coming to graduate school, but it has become more difficult learning how to manage my life. My life has changed completely. What I did before, I no longer do. When I started graduate school, I tried to do everything I did before, friends, family, socializing, relaxing, working, but it only lead to my stress and ineffective outcomes. I realized that if I did not learn to balance what I was doing, I would never make it. The sad thing is, I have never learned to balance all of life’s demands. Instead, I have just stopped doing some of the things that I enjoyed doing. My friends and family have now become second to my articles and books. What I do now looks completely different than what I did three years ago, in terms of how I allot my time, how I allot my energy, what I am able to invest in, and what I cannot invest in. I wanted to work while I was in school. I wanted to continue to be out there and retain a sense of what is really happening. My life is work and school. My life has changed. It has completely changed my time, energy, effort, investment. This means I need to carve out the time to relax, have coffee with a friend, see a movie, or do something for myself. Even little things like walking the dog, helps me relax and break from my study mode and go outside and get some air.”

“Three courses, plus a TA-ship, is a lot of work. I run from time to time and I go to a green belt that is around the house just to sit down and relax. The rhythm of trust and boundaries, both academic and personal, has made managing my life difficult. I try to exercise. I sing in choirs and I do some private recording sessions. These activities are more stress management exercises than life management but they retain my sanity. I have a fellowship; it is not structured and my attempts to make it structured are thwarted by other people. One day, I would like to realize my purpose and not have to justify myself to anyone. I do not have leisure time. Leisure time is when I am too tired to work and then I will watch a football game or do something like that. But that has been a real challenge for me. Intellectually, I am smart enough to finish the program, the question is, ‘Can I keep everything together with all my other responsibilities?’ One of the greatest transformations has been in my personal life. I work full time. My boyfriend leaves in the morning about 7:30 am so I get up with him and start my workday when he does and we both make full use of our days. When he gets home he wants to go out to dinner and hang-out. Although I cannot always do that, I find that I enjoy life more if I work really hard all day and then try to relax at night. I only wish I had more time to relax and do things I enjoy because I have many interests. I have not quite figured out how to balance them, because I do not want to give them up; they are a priority to me. My life management skills have changed completely since I started the program three years ago. I think I had an idea of how graduate school was going to be when I started. What I thought it was going to be versus what it is are two different things. Not that this experience has been bad. It has been a very good experience. But just because I decided

to stop life and come back to graduate school, that did not mean life stopped. I have to set aside time for myself. If I have trouble sitting at home for really deep studying, I come to the library and spend maybe six hours just at a table with my computer and my work. Just getting away from home can be relaxing too. The only handicap there is that I am all alone and I do not want to leave my equipment to go to the restroom or anything. Sometimes, to refresh myself, I go outside to read which reminds me that there is a world out there that I long to see when I finish my doctoral program.”

**On top of schoolwork, I work at a laboratory, as a teaching assistant, and I am also a grader.** Graduate students often balance *work* with their school activities. “My time at the university is not just for school; it is also where I earn my living. I have three part-time jobs, in addition to my course load. It is quite a lot to handle. I am good at scheduling my time and I keep schedules pretty well, but I usually end up having to sacrifice family time and time with my cats and the fun things I like to do. I am very fortunate in that my employer has been helpful. Money has not been as stressful for me as it has been for some. The trade-off is that time I give to my employers is very intense. It is easy for me because the work I do is interrelated to what I am studying. My work and my research complement each other. Scheduling classes is complicated because class offerings must coincide with available time. Since I can only travel certain days of the week, I must be careful of the number of classes I take each semester. Even if I could fit in more, I cannot complete that much homework. All of my ‘free time’ is eaten away. At this point, I am taking twelve credit hours. I completed my comprehensive examination this semester. I am both a student and a teacher, which means that I drive from school to



school. As a teacher, I am responsible for students and, as a student, I have my own class work to do. I teach students all day. Managing life has been challenging. I always thought I knew how to schedule well, but when I first started here I was working nearly full-time on a national initiative, teaching and taking fifteen credit hours.”

“In order to manage all of my work, I am in the office from 6 in the morning until 7 or 8 at night. I travel a lot at my job, too, so the fatigue is a combination of work and school. I am a full-time assistant principal at a middle school, which is a very demanding job. It is easily a sixty to seventy hour a week job. Luckily, I have a son and a husband; my son is in high school. When I started school, he was a little bit more needy. Juggling a full-time job and taking multiple classes is difficult. When I think about writing my dissertation I wonder how I will be able to manage that too. Much of this has to do with time management. I must set aside specific times to get certain things done and hold myself to it. I work full-time and also hold down a part-time job, as well, due to financial commitments. Without those financial commitments, I certainly would not be working right now and life management would be a whole lot easier. I am very fortunate to have my family; that helps me out financially. I am not as stressed as I used to be in the past. Basically, I am a full-time student. I work part time also in Mexico; I travel all of the time. With my work schedule, I work anytime I can log into the internet. I am glad the World Wide Web exists. When I started this in 2004, I was the Director of Special Ed for an independent school district. I had 10,000 kids with disabilities for whom I was responsible. By taking just one class at a time, I coped with my work life. I also had a young child at home who was still in middle school and I was a single parent. So, taking

a few courses at a time helped me to still manage my life and grow academically. I have had to be much more intentional about my life and manage my travel for work and my travel for school carefully. Life management is especially an interesting topic to me because I am so busy. I work so many hours that I have very little free time. I do have a husband who helps me with the small tasks that make a difference. I go to the grocery store and cook dinner, those types of things, but I do not have much of a social life. I spend my evenings doing homework and then it is time to sleep. Then, I get up, go to work, and do it all over again the next day.”

“Having come from working fourteen-hour days and sleeping with a Blackberry next to me, this new life working on campus and taking classes has been challenging in the sense that when the pace slows down, you are forced to reevaluate how you spend your time. First, you flounder around a little bit because you do not know what to do with yourself. There are fewer pressing deadlines; the incessant calls slow down; there is no pressure to get things done by 5:00 am. When you get off the initial shock of that whole silence, it is actually golden. I have a clinical job, research, classes, and another clinical job. I am always balancing all four or five of those jobs. I work hard to balance having a social life and a boyfriend. It is a constant bouncing ball; I live by my calendar. I worked at a company overseas. I earned the money to come here by working there. I came to the United States after five years of industry work. Life management was not very good. Actually, it was bad. Each additional year of paying tuition makes it more of a financial burden for me and for my family. So I have had to balance my life, and it has been very difficult. I also teach a couple of on-line classes in addition to my research jobs. I am not

a traditional graduate student. I have always worked full-time and attended graduate school as well. I am handling the money challenges, but as far as time, time has been a real problem because I work a bunch of jobs about sixty hours per week. I teach about twenty hours per week; I go to school taking about twelve credits per term, so that was tough. Forget about relaxing. My wife does a good job taking care of that. I e-mail my kids on an infrequent basis. I call my mother once in awhile. I go home during summer and the winter breaks. Financially, I am able to go through the program with a federal grant. My part-time job has helped me to pay for my younger daughter's tuition and allowances. I cannot work any more jobs because I need to have some time to focus on my studies. Carrying twelve to fifteen semester units every semester is no joke! What I had learned in my corporate life has helped me to manage my crazy schedules and achieve what I want to accomplish."

"My life right now is a disaster; it is an absolute disaster. This is the legislative session, this particular session, has been crazy. The reality is that the Ph.D. program is probably fourth or fifth on my list of importance. I do everything I can to squeeze out a few hours after my son is put to bed and I see my wife. I try to squeeze out enough time to get through my assignments. It is going to be really tough to write a dissertation. I am hoping that, as my son gets a little bit older, I can carve out some time. My son is just over a year now, so he is a lot of work. Not as much as when he was first born, but he is still a lot of work. My wife is pretty resistant. I mean, theoretically, she supports this for the practical benefits it will yield, but she sure does not like it. I have a Palm Pilot. My meetings are set for me for the most part. I wake up, look at my Palm Pilot, and know

what I am going to do for the day. To give you an example, I have a unique position where I work. I have three distinct departments and about fifteen individuals who report to me. Each individual has a different need. Also, there are an enormous number of outside constituents. It is not uncommon for me to have a day where I will have a meeting on the hour every hour and, unfortunately, there have been times when I am double and triple booked on meetings. Sometimes I must cut out of one meeting just to go meet the tail end of another and then hit the tail end of another. They are all important, so I cannot cancel. They were scheduled, so I needed to be there. When you tack on school and family, scheduling is nearly an impossible chore. Scheduling is impossible. I have a cell phone. My secretary probably calls me at least 8-10 times a day on my cell phone, even when I am on campus.”

“I would describe student life more as survival than anything. Some of my colleagues who do not work full-time get together during the day and participate in writing groups and discuss their research. I just have to trade off some important pieces of the graduate experience because I do not, I cannot take that time from work. I am fortunate to be able to take a course during the day, but I cannot participate in the extra events, speaker programs, meetings, and study groups that are part of student life. What I do get to do, like night classes, allow me to engage more; it frees up some of my daytime. I am only taking one night class this semester, but I am still able to reserve some time during the day to concentrate on my assignments. So, instead of fighting sleep to get through the work, I appreciate being awake, alert, and able to think more coherently about what is going on. That has helped a lot.”

## Relationships

Relationships in graduate school are associations and interactions with individuals in all aspects of life. Relationships may be close or distant, but they are all part of a student's circle of communication. The subaffinities for Relationships in graduate school include: close school friendships, school acquaintances, faculty, cohort, networking, family, and friends outside of school.

### **I depend on the people who have already gone through the classes to help me.**

Graduate students often describe their *close school friendships* at school as part of their experience. "I can e-mail them and say, 'Hey, when you took your exam, what books or articles did you find helpful in preparation?' When I see students taking classes I took, I return the favor to the upcoming group. Other aspects of relationship-building are negative. Some students feel so strongly about an issue that they are not willing to hear the other side and you realize that they are not people you want to work with on a group project. It is my experience that older graduate students have more patience. In comparison, I am a 'baby graduate student'. I am always surprised when, after three years of graduate school, someone in class calls out, 'What is the APA style manual?' Maybe this is just another example of my lack of patience, but I want to say to them, 'Go to the professor's office hours or ask your friends, but please do not ask that in class.' We are all so busy and do not have time for students who are not prepared for graduate school. I think it is detrimental to the educational process."

“From some students, you gain fabulous resources, connections, and friendships; these are the people you want to remain friends with after graduate school is over. My program does not have a cohort, so a group of students made our own cohort. I have made some good friends. I did not think I would make good friends until we decided to do our own cohort. We all know each other from classes or, at least, a lot of us know each other’s names from working on campus. We advise each other, help each other, hold each other up; man I do not know what I would do without these people. Having a real cohort would be good, but when it is not formal, it can sometimes be bad because people come and go and students are not quite committed. You decide the relationships you want depending upon your goals. That is one huge relationship issue because people come and go and it really is not a cohort. I wish we had a formal one. Still, the relationships I have with my peers are, pretty much, what gets me through each semester. Relationships with my peers have definitely been good. Talking to other graduate students and hearing that everybody else is going through the same experiences, helps you to not feel quite so overwhelmed. One classmate has been helpful in giving me ideas for creative research and deciding upon courses to take each semester. We decide what we will take together, because it is much easier than taking classes alone. We also trade articles about research and, whenever he has a new paper topic, I find articles to help him and vice versa.”

“Making school friends has never been a problem. As I grow professionally and as my colleagues grow professionally, my friends will always be my connection to this experience because we have all gone through this together. We all deal with similar issues. Many of us are administrators and we ask, ‘What would you do if you came

across this situation? How are you coping with budget issues? What you are doing at your institution that is working?’ Maybe their experience can relate to or work at my institution. The exchange of ideas has been valuable, too. Relationships are important because the people you are around, your peers, professors, connections can help promote your success. In terms of finding people who are interested in similar research topics, this can help you progress through research classes. Friends you develop in graduate school are those you will keep for the rest of your life; they understand what you are going through; they get it. My program often requires teamwork. We developed really nice bonds. I found people who had similar methods of working. They agreed to meet for collaborative projects and they were also responsible. I had a nice experience during my graduate life and built great relationships. Even though I do not see some of the people anymore, we keep in touch and have become great friends. Some have already graduated. I have socialized and become friends with some outside of the classroom as well.”

“Relationships are something I harp on a lot. I have foreign connections, not just with my family, but I have a foreign born mother and many foreign friends here at the university from Taiwan and Korea. I have been to Asia a couple of times and am going back again in December. I taught English in Asia and I studied Mandarin Chinese there. I am the only American who is a member of the Taiwanese Student Association and I am the only grad student who is a member of the Vietnamese Student Association. In my department I have a couple of close friends with whom I can share everything. As for my international friends, I have some Taiwanese friends, but mostly, I just hang out with my Korean friends from my own home country. I discuss my research and intellectual

pursuits with my classmates and we often help each other. Graduate school has been a positive experience for me. Relationships outside of my scope of study or area of expertise and interest have been easy for me to make. There has been minimal competition. We are not competing, because we all have our own particular niche. Also, the relationships I have made are sustainable, I think, for the rest of my life.”

“Also, our department promotes collaboration and peer mentoring; I am involved in informal mentoring. I also TA for my advisor. Many of his students come to me when he is not available. The dynamics of my relationship with my peers have been interesting. Often I am their lecturer from 1:00 pm to 4:00 p.m. and then I am their classmate from 4:00 pm to 7:00 pm. It is a blessing that these individuals have always been friendly and easy to get along with. I do have good relationships with almost all the administrators and administrative associates in my area, too. With 20 years in the corporate environment, I know a lot about office politics. I am a people-oriented person. I favor collaboration and reject competition. I like negotiation and dislike confrontation. As an older person going through the program, my life experiences have taught me the importance of ‘good relationships’. My culture taught me to be humble and my family raised me to be respectful and supportive as a woman. I try not to do things to people that I would not want people to do to me. I know I cannot make friends with everybody but I try to be helpful to everyone who asks for help from me. I believe relationships are a two-way street. I help people; people help me. Usually, people give nice people a break or help in some ways.”



“I have made some good friends as a result of being in school here and being a graduate student. I am really appreciative of that. I realize the importance of relationships, especially as I get to the end. Going through the entire process with these students, you kind of help build each other up and make sure each of you are staying on track. One friend is slacking a bit. Three of us keep trying to pull him along by encouraging him and telling him not to give up. I do not think I would have made it without the relationships that I have with people here at the university. You need somebody to vent with or to and somebody who will listen when you have a problem with a faculty member. That has been really important. It is different, having this experience versus the friends I made as an undergraduate. Part of this is the natural progression of being older. There are not as many social times to get together, but you can make really good friends during break time and in class. I appreciate the relationships and the contacts I have made. Not everybody I have met works here or will stay in this environment, but my connections will benefit me after I graduate.”

“My relationships are long lasting, in part, because I am the coordinator of the student professional association. Through that network, I have formed relationships with other people around the university and those have been really helpful for me. It is tough because I work forty to fifty minutes away and I have two kids. One child is in college and the other one is in high school. I work full-time so time management is very hard, but I come to functions on campus just so I can form these relationships. Those will get me to my career goal. There are many types of relationships in grad school. The first thing that comes to mind is peers. People in your cohort, in your classes, and in university

organizations make up this circle. I am part of the Graduate Student Assembly and the Black Graduate Student's Organization. Those relationships have helped me navigate the process and better understand my place in graduate school. Through my relationships, I have learned how to get signatures on my dissertation and collaborate with people on big college wide projects. You have to build relationships with people who will sit on your dissertation committee and be comfortable with a variety of people who will help you succeed in graduate school and beyond. These people can become part of your network to provide you with opportunities to be successful after graduate school. The close relationships you develop are a vital part of the graduate school experience."

"Any time you work closely with someone there will be ups and downs. When it comes to relationships, I feel that I have not been able to have real relationships with people, even other grad students, just because you need folks who will understand that, first and foremost, you are a student. You cannot go out to drink or party. If it is a young lady, she has got to understand that, 'Hey, I work all day. I am in class all evening. I have to read all night. I will get you when I can, but that is not my priority right now. And that is not forever. That is just for this period, this season in my life.' So I feel like all of my relationships have to be understanding of that reality. In considering relationships in a broader sense, relationships with peers, co-workers, and family members are tougher because of the intensity of the graduate experience. Because I work a full-time job, I have to have a good relationship with my supervisor. Sometimes I have to leave work early, even when I have a lot happening. I have to make sure that I do what I need to do at work so I can leave early enough to be in class on time. This serves as a barrier to developing

relationships with classroom peers too. For the first year and a half, I was a full-time student and I made lots of friends and close connections. Since then, I took a job. At the point where I went back to work full time, building relationships became extremely difficult.”

“In my department, there are about twenty Ph.D. students. We usually pick up one student per semester. When I started my Ph.D., I was the only Ph.D. student in my program. When I took classes, everyone else had their own friends related to their research interests and their cultural background; I was kind of isolated. Unfortunately, not until the next year and two years later did our department pick up a Ph.D. student, so I was the only Ph.D. student in my department for two years. I did not make many relationships with other graduate students in the university. I have had three or four really good relationships with my classmates and they have been very enriching because we have the same research interests and we think the same way. As an international student, most of my connections are with international students. We share common experiences, the same cultural shock, frustrations, and joys. I get along with my American peers, especially those who have lived and studied abroad. They have lots of international experience. There are also relationships formed during the classes, but not many of them will survive after we all finish.”

“Relationships are mostly based upon in-class interactions. I have a fellowship that pays for my graduate experience. Two of my colleagues are in the same position. That pool of people is growing because the School of Information received a multi-year, multi-million dollar grant and we were the first batch of Ph.D. students. We are fortunate

to have a close-knit group. We have gone through core courses together. Especially the first year, we met once a week, talked about the requirements, inquired about how we were doing, and asked about the expectations of the programs. The bar is set higher for us. That stress brought us together more. Other than that, working full-time and having a family, there are not a whole lot of opportunities to hang out outside of courses and formal meetings. We do very little collaborative work together and do not have a lot of social interaction.”

“Your fellow students help you get through; they are your ‘colleagues’. They remember when you began, how you grew, and your persistence to the finish line. They are also your new group of friends; the people you go out with after class. You celebrate triumphs and share common successes. When you are struggling, you turn to them for support. So much of graduate school is an isolating experience. My program is fairly small. Often, I have the same students in each class, so relationships with the students and faculty will probably extend longer than if I were full time and could finish in a shorter period. Relationships are sometimes easy and sometimes they are not. I have found this university friendlier than where I completed my master’s degree. I have definitely had a much better experience making connections and establishing relationships here. These relationships with my peers have been great. Coming to the university, I was nervous because most of the people I met during orientation had already received their master’s degree here too. It was a bit nerve-racking because they already had their close-knit groups. I felt like an outsider. But, from the first day, it was different than I expected. I felt like we created this connection. Our lives were parallel, but we connected, worked

together, and sought to understand and help each other. One of my greatest experiences being in the program has been getting to know my peers and finding out who they are as people. You have your friends who are always there to help and get through the difficult times. These colleagues will hopefully become your colleagues later on in the research world and you can meet at conferences and work on collaborative projects together.”

“Relationships with my friends on campus have been very good, especially with other international students. They are very kind to me because they are in the same situation. They understand and feel more compelled to be nice to me compared to someone from the United States. Living here has made it easier to build relationships. I love this city a lot and I think this is the best city I have ever lived in. I have made good friends in the graduate program, people who will be there with me for career opportunities but also friendships and support. Having gone through the experience together and connecting with people with whom I share common interests has been wonderful and rewarding. You have to know the system and be able to go through the hoops. I guess people come with varying degrees of skills for developing relationships. Some people are real gregarious and some people are little bit more laid back. My peers have contributed much to my experience. I am going through a difficult family situation in my life right now and they have been very supportive. I have appreciated the support they have provided. It has really helped me get through this intense period that I am going through right now.”

“It is not about envy or jealousy, but those students who attend school full-time and also work just have a different lifestyle. I tend to be the most connected with peers

who have similar circumstances, because I feel they can relate to me. My work involves interacting and serving undergraduates at the university; I also take classes here. My best relationships are with peers who are in the same field. The talent and wisdom of my peers have a major impact on the quality of the program. Once again, my relationships have been both positive and negative. I have met some excellent people and I will remain friends with them for the rest of my life. They have a major influence on me, personally and professionally. There are a number of people in the group whom I find exceptionally unprofessional and exceptionally detrimental. I am amazed by some of their conduct. However, if you can work with somebody and work with them well, in spite of all the other stuff, that builds your relationship too and teaches you important lessons. You have your personal friends whom you select and build relationships and then you have your working friends.”

“By in-large, my relationships with my peers have been very positive. I really do get along with everyone. That could be seen as a weakness. I try to do that without compromising my principles or without being two-faced; I succeed for the most part. I enjoy a variety of people and interacting with lots of people. Although I might not agree with what everyone does or what everyone says or where they come from, I always strive to respect people and to treat them like I would like to be treated. I think that works out pretty well for me. Over time, I have developed some close friendships. For the most part, the relationships I have established are wonderful; they are supportive and helpful. I have established some relationships that now exist beyond the realm of graduate school and I think those are relationships will probably last, if not for the rest of graduate school,

throughout the rest of my life. I have always believed that it is important to have good relationships at work because relationships build connections; it builds opportunities. In graduate school, I basically approached relationships with my peers in the same way. One thing we all must face is the notion that you cannot be friends with everybody because they take time, trust, and bonding. That is why I work hard to cultivate a good working relationship with almost all of the peers in my graduate course of study.”

“I have been in pretty intense situations in the military - combat situations where relationships are key. You cannot have misunderstandings and bad relationships with people you work with on a daily basis. So, whatever you do, it is important to mend relationships with people, no matter what, and work hard at it. I am friendly and have lots of acquaintances. When I have close friends, they are really close friends. Traditionally, my close friends are those who are introduced through work or, in this case, academic contacts. There is solitary in this program, which is unusual for me. My master’s program was very structured. There were seventeen or eighteen other people and we all took the same classes together; I had some very strong friendships. This program does not have a cohort and it is very different. When another person shares similar interests, our interests form a common ground for our friendship. Those friendships grow to become social friendships. There is an academic and a social component to this particular relationship, but I would not say that there are any relationships that have been just strictly business. I do not have a strictly academic friend or a fair-weather friend. If I care enough to call them ‘friend’, it is personal.”

“I do not think I would still be here without the friends I have developed. From the very first class, I have been fortunate enough to meet people who have become really important in my life. They have become my extended family. We support each other and constantly talk to each other. We call ourselves ‘the divas’ because of a class project. If one of us is having a crisis, the other two are doing triage. We get together and support each other. It is literally lifesaving. I have developed so many relationships with colleagues or students at the university that have been phenomenal. I just think back to where I was two years ago and think of the relationships that I have developed since then. It has been a great experience. I have met people who thought differently from me and learned from them and I have also met people who think like me and validate what I believe. It has been a learning experience to have very good friends who I would not have met if I had not come to the university.”

“A couple of women my age have similar backgrounds and similar interests. We like the outdoors. One is a climber like I am. The other lives on a farm like I do. We share common bonds. Two others hold similar positions to me at other institutions. My friends have gotten used to me responding weeks late to e-mails and with fewer than six words. My e-mails now usually read, ‘Congrats. Wow! Paper, really busy!’ I have made other friends in school too. I am not sure that I would say that these relationships are as rich and sincere as my relationships prior to school, but they are relationships. My friends are now more like partners in the sense that we support each other and encourage each other to get through school. My friendships are based on who will pull their share of work while working in a group. That may sound bad, but it is the truth. Relationships



with colleagues can help academically; they make school easier. If I call a friend, they can explain an assignment or read over my paper or discuss a reading together. If I miss a day, a friend in the program will call me. This becomes a support group for school, like built-in tutors. If they make copies of what we are reading, they make me a copy. I feel like I am not doing this alone. It feels like teamwork. I know that the Ph.D. pursuit is supposed to be individual, but this feels like I am part of a team. I mean, I still have my individual responsibilities, but I do not feel alone.”

“A few years ago, I met a Vietnamese martial arts instructor at the gym; she invited me to join her class. I joined and found it really strenuous. I am the oldest person and the only graduate student. Still, I hung in there. I hang out with them after class and have dinner with them at the school cafeteria. I really love my Vietnamese friends. I joined the Vietnamese Student Association [VSA] and have been as active as I could. Each semester I attend club activities; it is a fun club. They have a date auction and a Thanksgiving potluck. Each member is assigned to a ‘family’ because the club is so big. This connects members to their own ‘family’ activities. My ‘family’ this year is called Squirt; our motto is ‘Squirt till you hurt’. That is my family. They are all undergraduates, but I just have a blast with them. Last year, I got some mileage out of that. When I visited Taiwan, the people I met asked me how I can speak Mandarin as a white-skinned American with a Spanish surname who was educated in Charleston, South Carolina at a military college. I told them, ‘Well, I have a Chinese father and a Vietnamese mother.’ It was so funny to see their reaction as they stared at me in disbelief. They looked me up and down, checking out my height first, because most people who have Asian parents do

not look like me. Then, I showed them pictures of ‘my parents’ who are twenty-eight year old undergraduates. The room got silent and then finally somebody said, ‘Your parents look very young.’ I just had a real blast with them. Students from the Taiwanese Student Association [TSA] invited me to join their club too, because I am a friend of theirs and have been to their country several times. The TSA is also a very active organization and they treat me like family. They constantly help me with my Mandarin homework and anything else I need. In fact, during the last two summers, they were a source of a cheap airplane ride through a travel agent they use. They suggested cheap lodging through churches; I did not even know that was possible. They also found me a job teaching. So, the last few summers have been tremendous. I harp at my Taiwanese friends that it is all about relationships at the university. In fact, I was involved in an orientation with Taiwanese students this summer in downtown Taipei. For one thing, we are very multicultural at the university, so this is a chance to make connections with people from all over the world. Plus, you will never see those people in one place at one time. Your workplace will not have people just from Thailand, India, Taiwan, Malaysia, Pakistan and other countries. It is also a good time to make friends and make connections with people for personal and professional reasons. But more to the point, on the day-to-day grad school level, it does not pay to be a lone wolf. We really do help each other. Just like the Taiwanese helped me, well I help them.”

**I came here for a pretty singular focus, to get a degree, and that does not leave time to develop close relationships.** Some graduate student relationships are more like *acquaintances* rather than friendships. “When I went to graduate school the first

time, I was in a large master's program. Our entire cohort went to Australia together; we were fairly close. Then, I entered a Ph.D. program. It was much smaller and I was more of a solo operator. My classmates were just acquaintances; I met them in class and said hello. I am friendly, but after class we do not call or connect with each other. I am not one to make lot of superficial friends. I am not a particularly social person. I love talking to people and am personable and friendly by nature, but I do not tend to let many people become too personal. I keep them at a distance. Again, I just do not have the time or energy to give right now and, as much as I have become a peer with my professors, I have a fairly solitary experience. Over the last several years, I have been working and going to school. To me, friendships and relationships require time and work. I would rather not have another expectation placed on me. While I talk to fellow students during class, write to them via e-mail, and work together on projects, I do not consider my classmates 'friends'. I cannot pick up the phone after the semester is over and talk to them. There is not that kind of relationship because I do not hang out with them. After class I drive back two hours south of here to get home as soon as possible."

"Relationships in graduate school can be a bit of a challenge for a number of reasons. First, I do have my kids every weekend. Second, I also have a forty hour a week job. Third, most of the students are significantly younger than I am. Lastly, they do not have the life experiences I have. With that said, there are some commonalities between myself and many other students. Some of them are ex-service folks. One person who is going through the program is from the Air Force Academy. Occasionally, we get together and piss and moan about a faculty member or a particular instructional challenge we all

face. Some people who preceded us in the program serve as a model. One person, in particular, does quality work and, based upon what we see, he is a great employee as well. It is nice to have a bunch of differently talented colleagues who have their own sets of attributes and challenges. They share their struggles, survival skills, and how they overcame the challenges.”

“I am very selective. I will say that straight out. I do not trust anybody. The hard part with graduate school is that everyone is out for their own motives. Everyone is trying to get ahead to a certain degree. Be careful of what you say because it will get back to somebody else. It gets complicated and it is not worth ruining my reputation. I chose one or two people that I know are really fair-minded and will not say anything. I test the waters. I will say something, knowing full well that it could get back, but I say it and wait to see if it is said to somebody. Then, if no information comes back, I know that person can be trusted. I am very careful because I know a lot of the stuff gets back to the professors. Then the professors will say stuff to me and ask me to tell them what I know. I just say, ‘I really do not know.’ It is a really scary feeling because, if the faculty do not like you, they can make it difficult for you to finish. At this point, my plan is to get an education. I find it really hard when the professors are not on my side because they just blow you off when you need help.”

“Working at the Capitol, I often take class every now with people I know. I am friendly with them. Some people call me and ask for assistance and I am more than happy to give it, but it is not an environment where I need or seek out new relationships. Just because I am not ‘friendly’ does not mean I do not consider them professional peers. It is

very practical for me at this point. This university environment has exposed me to many people who I will know for a long time; I have developed a lot of acquaintances. I am lucky. I have lots of connections. Graduate school has been good for helping me get to know a wider group of people. Even though my time is limited, it has been wonderful and I will always cherish this experience. I am a people person and I do not like being alone. I network with lots of people and I really enjoy the relationship aspect of this experience. In our program, I have developed many connections; some of them will become friends. I like working with peers. To me it means a lot. Making friends and connections gets me through. Through a connection with peers I can ask questions and find out if they have experienced the same problems; it is all about helping one another. Relationships allow you to collaborate; it is important to connect with people so that you can help each other. I am in a very competitive program. We are ranked nationally in terms of departments. We are definitely one of the largest programs. We have a lot going on. We have cutting-edge research. Relationships with some of my fellow doctoral students have been tense at times or non-existent, false, or unstable. If I have a relationship with a fellow grad student, it is very shallow, not an actual friendship; my fellow doctoral students are just acquaintances. The relationships are collaborative, but also very competitive. One situation still bothers me. I needed assistance from a friend in my department with an issue. I thought I could trust her and she seemed fine. She offered her assistance when I needed it. A couple of days later, everyone in my department knew what was going on with a personal issue I had; it was embarrassing for me and hard for me to accept. My trust was violated. Someone took that story from me. That kind of soured my department

relationships. Now my goal is to complete my program, finish my coursework, and get my dissertation written so I can check this off and move along to the next thing.”

“When I was a full time student, I had a loose relationship with people in my classes. Now that I am a part time student, I do not feel that I have to sustain a relationship because people in class are just people I see and talk to in class. I do not spend any time with them outside of the class. I feel like I make connections with people who are full time graduate students, but not people who are part time graduate students. These connections are nice to have, but they do not advance anything. Now, I work full-time and go to school full-time, so time is always an issue. There have only been a few times when I hung out with people after class. If I see anyone on campus I am always amazed because campus is so big. Most students have the ‘we are in this together’ approach. They try to be supportive. It would be very interesting to find out how busy everybody is. If someone comes to class late no one looks at them as if they are a bad person; they assume they have a good reason. My relationships in graduate school have actually been quite positive. I have made quite a few friends within the program and some in other departments. I do not see those in my program as much because most of them work full-time, too. So there is really not a whole lot of time to hang out or dialogue as much. When we get in class we talk about our jobs due to that common bond. We tend to talk more work, rather than classes.”

“At the same time my friends are competitive, I collaborate with them. They are in my corner. In the future, when I go back to Korea, I will maintain my relationships with them. It is not because they are good or nice to me, but it is because I want to invest

myself in the future. Overall, relationships in the graduate experience have been positive. At the same time, the graduate experience has put a strain on my relationships. If you have conflicts in your schedule when you are working as a part of a very tight working team, something has to give. I cannot be everywhere. At the same time, there are people, especially some students in their fourth year, who paved the way and offered to help. They understand. I have a couple of good friends and some acquaintances. People are nice in this city. They are very generous by offering to help. I am very impressed. I have developed relationships with graduate students, but some of them are more about socializing. We talk about what we need for class and then work with a faculty member to get things done. I can do this program because I commute. I am not here all the time. If I were here all the time, interacting with people every single day, it would be harder for me to maintain relationships with a broader group of people.”

**Since I am not a graduate assistant and I do not work at the university, there is a disconnect between my faculty, the program, and me.** Some graduate students suggested that *faculty relationships* define their graduate experience. “Some of my classmates who see faculty on a daily basis outside of class have connections and build good relationships that I do not get a chance to build. By the time we are in class, it is strictly business. As I end my program, I take the initiative to speak with faculty since they are on my dissertation committee. I want to get to know them better as people outside of the classroom. I have good relationships with two or three of the faculty and I feel like basically I have to strategically pick. There are people I just like because of who they are and then there are those people you have to have a good relationship with in

order to succeed in any way. So, for example, in our department, the Chair is very stringent and sometimes it is hard to get along with him. At the same time, you have to maintain a really good relationship so that she likes you, she thinks that what you are doing is good, and pushing things forward in the department. Your success seems very much geared around who you pick for your committee and who you pick to work with in terms of doing research, papers, and presentations.”

“The major reason I started this Ph.D. program was because my boss used to be my advisor. She encouraged me to get this degree. Her encouragement is a good example of faculty relationships. She graduated from the university. When I applied, she gave me a recommendation letter. If it had not been for her, I would not have come here to get a Ph.D. degree. Also, the way many faculty structure classes, there are group projects. You automatically have a common goal with classmates. The relationship developed is not artificial, but something that is very real and meaningful. When you are looking at goals and persistence towards your goals, you connect with other people. On another level, relationships with faculty members can also help you get through the dissertation process rather than trying to do it alone. Also, the mentorship component and advisor relationships in graduate school are extremely important. Depending on the faculty support, you can see a good model for how to develop supportive relationships.”

“It is kind of personal. With my advisor, I developed an idea, collected data, and we did the whole process together. My advisor is encouraging; she helps me get through everything. She manages my schedule and checks everything I do. I just had a baby, so managing my life is difficult. She pushes me to get done and helps me draw out a map of



where I am versus where I have to go. I have definitely made some very strong relationships with faculty members. I am fortunate in that I worked for them on the master's level. I bugged them and kept showing up at their office. So, over time, I developed these relationships more on a personal level than a professional level at this point. I can stop by and talk to them and joke with them; we have a good rapport. As far as actually assisting in the development of my program I think that, because we have a good personal relationship, that will come, but it has not yet occurred. It is not just a faculty-advisor relationship; it is a supportive relationship, like a friendship. It is the same way with cohort members. As far as I am concerned, faculty impact is the biggest driver out there and it is killing me.”

“A professor who oversees the Fulbright Scholarship helped me think through where I am now versus where I want to be and how I need to position myself to get to where I want to be. I have a problem pacing so that I do not get ahead of myself. Talking with him and other professors has helped me see that along the way, I will have opportunities as long as I listen to faculty. I need to remain gracious about where I am now and just be positive and prepare myself because the future is bright. I am an international student and English is my second language so when I talk about the relationships in the graduate experience the biggest relationship for me is with faculty. It is difficult to create relationships with other graduate students because of the language barrier and because of cultural differences. So, the relationships in my graduate experience are mostly between the professors and me. The students create their own

camaraderie, but the professors have stepped in and helped us get our courses figured out. The first year doctoral work is challenging, but I am glad I am here.”

“Due to my position as the graduate assistant I was popular in my master’s program. Students came to me for answers when the professor was spending time with other students. I was what they call the ‘teacher’s pet’ and I hung out with the professors more than the students. It had to do with my age too. When I started, though, I was worried and then I got to know people on campus and began to feel more comfortable. As an older student, the first relationships I developed were the faculty. My advisor is absolutely wonderful. Other faculty members also encouraged me to continue. Over time, I have gotten to know lots of people. Faculty grade you and go to bat for you. Especially when you get down to your dissertation, you need to pick faculty members for your committee with whom you have built a good relationship. My faculty relationships have always been good. Since the faculty have known me longer, they are just getting to know me better.”

“Relationships with faculty are not exceptional. Faculty teach and advise those whom they have to teach. They did not choose the students in their classes. So, after awhile, students can become just a number in the classroom. Other relationships are important in graduate school, which is why I did not say that faculty relationships are the most important. Four people in my Ph.D. program did the master’s program together and we offer each other support. We take classes together. Students are not getting guidance from the faculty and actually that unites us. I think we have learned to help each other and tell each other what classes are open and what classes you should take, things we

have heard from other students about different classes. We get from each other what we are not getting from the faculty. I do not think I would be where I am if I did not have the support from them and the realization that other students are also stressed. This gives me a feeling that I am not doing a poor job; this is just difficult. I am thankful that they help me through this program. Other than my relationship with my academic advisor, my relationships with other faculty are pretty much neutral.”

“The person who recruited me had been doing what I was doing. He had a lot of credibility, not only at the university, but also within the state and the nation as far as his expertise. That relationship just kept growing and I consider him a very good friend at this point. Relationships with faculty are really good, at least so far. Hopefully, they will be good when I complete my oral proposal and defense. The relationship with my peers and my friends outside of my department are also very important. The relationship with my family back in my home country is really, really important. If that was not going well, I would not be able to focus on work. I have developed close relationships with my advisors, faculty members, mentors, and other people in the department who are a part of the university. Relationships are a critical part of the experience. Relationships have positive and negative impacts in that there are some relationships you will want to keep after the program is over because they motivate and encourage you. You will always remember them because they keep you going even when you are frustrated.”

“Students who are here on campus all the time have close relationships with the faculty. I commute from a couple of hours away, so it is more difficult to stop by one of my professors’ offices. I work two jobs and my professors teach full-time. At home, I

have a child who depends upon me. Instead of sitting around talking in an office to my professor, I would rather be at home with my kid, at work, or doing homework for my classes. I do not have the chance to build the kind of relationship other students can build with faculty or even with my classmates. I need to have a good relationship with at least one professor who can serve as a mentor. Unfortunately, I do not have that. I have good relationships with all of them but not on a mentor level. I think that is something that needs to be established in our department officially. Research suggests that mentoring can create an important graduate school relationship, but the only mentor I have is leaving our department.”

“I have done research projects and experiments with one of my dissertation committee members. I was his TA for several semesters. We are on such a comfortable level that we call each other up if we have an issue. We will say, ‘What do you mean by this statement in this article?’ We are not friends. We do not go to the bars together or out to eat, but just work well in this academic environment; we are very comfortable in terms of our relationship with each other. I call him professor and he calls me by my first name. I do not call him by his first name. We are not on a first name basis, but I always do that to show respect for him, especially in front of the other doctoral students. He is my advisor, but we are just very close and connected. I have worked with my advisor for six or seven years, ever since I became a graduate student I am still working with her now. I am actually closer to the faculty than I am to my fellow doctoral students. Relationships with faculty are positive. I do not think I have had any negative experiences.”

“If you have good relationships with professors and students you tend to have a good overall outlook. If everybody else is confused, then you do not feel bad about being confused. If you do not talk to anybody you might feel like you are the only one. With my advisors and professors, we are the kind of friends who get coffee, hang out, and talk. The way I teach has changed because now I am a student. Being a student gives me perspective on the way I relate to my students. I sometimes think, ‘Man, that lecture did not work for me last night. I will never do that in my class, ever.’ On other occasions, when a professor wants me to do something, I think, ‘Ah, I can do that.’ At times, I feel just the way my students feel; sometimes optimistic, sometimes pessimistic.”

“I am not always good in managing my time so that affects my relationships with faculty and with the students. The fact that I did not get the guidance from the faculty affected my coursework, which in turn created a whole mess for me this summer. I cannot take classes, but I am required to take some this summer if I want to finish in a short amount of time. I have a problem. If I knew in advance how to schedule my coursework for these three years, I would have done it in a better way. But the fact there was no guidance from the faculty in the first place affected my whole life management and that puts stress on the family and friends and my free time. Whether or not you finish depends upon forming positive relationships with faculty. Again, it goes back to playing the game. The politics depends upon the relationships and how they all congeal.”

“I have more in common with some faculty members than others. With some faculty members, I am comfortable sitting down and sharing my thoughts and ideas. With others, I am more guarded. As far as graduate students, it is the same thing. I think it is

typical of any type of relationship; some people you naturally gravitate toward, because you have more in common. Relationships with graduate students on campus pretty much involve those in our discipline, although I look forward to taking a few classes in another field. Linking this to faculty impact and faculty interaction, we often do not get great advice from faculty advisors, but we get great advice from our peers. Your peers tell you, ‘Hey, you need to take a class with so and so or do not take so and so’s class. That guy is so lame and he is a hard grader. Take so and so. He rocks. You will learn a lot!’ Also, your peers give you the ride to the airport and advice about classes. You cry on their shoulder when you are having difficulties and they cry on your shoulder. If you do not have peers you can count on and do not make connections, you make your road rockier than is necessary in the graduate school experience.”

**There is a dependence and inter-dependence among members.** Some graduate students are accepted and go through their program as a *cohort*. “You did not choose this group, it was chosen for you. You came in and the director of the program had already picked the 12 or 15 people. You either have to be open enough to accept these relationships or close yourself off. Unfortunately, in my program, we have to deal with conflict on a daily basis. When a problem arises, I do not see some of the folks in my cohort; they avoid conflict at all costs or they will give in to anything. In a passive-aggressive way, they will do whatever you suggest and then complain about it. To me, that is very destructive, because it is a dishonest way to work with people. If you have an issue, you should just tell them. There are some people who do not want to handle or resolve the conflict. They do not want to talk about the issues or listen to other’s

opinions. They do not want to share their own opinions about things, but you hear about it later. They will go off and tell somebody else about what they wanted to see happen later instead of discussing it in a more open forum. Some of that I think is distrust, but some of it is because they do not know how to deal with conflict.”

“In our cohort, many students distrust one another or the process the cohort has chosen. There are emotional issues involved. But, at the end of the day, most of the people in the cohort say, ‘Okay, let’s put that aside; we have to get this done. I do not have to like you. I do not have to play in the sandbox with you, but we have to get this project done.’ That is what is really good about my particular program because we are able to get past most of people’s individual differences. You may not go to dinner with these people, go to the movies, or have an intense relationship with them, but you have a working relationship. You have a professional relationship. Above all, this is what will carry us down the road. These relationships are essentially networking. As you might expect in any group experience where people are together during a very intense period in their life working on their doctorate, the whole cohort structure of the program lends itself to intergroup conflict. That is just human nature. We have experienced some of that over the course of the year. The conflict can drain your energy. It can take away your focus. It can somewhat diminish the experience you might otherwise have in the relationships with the people who are part of the cohort.”

“There is an assumption from outsiders looking in that, if you are in a cohort, it is one big happy family and that everything is wonderful all the time. That is not necessarily the case. There is a lot of stress and tension at times between members of the cohort.

However, when it is all said and done, I truly enjoy the time I spend with them. So, the competitive relationship with my cohort is a motivator. I do research with them, work on projects with them, and we help each other out. We give and receive advice about our research and it is very helpful, but at the same time, I have to think about the future. It is kind of selfish, but I have to think about what happens when this program is done. The one thing I really like about this program, since we are in a cohort, we are given an opportunity to work with some really good people. We put practice into operation; we get practical knowledge.”

“You are not going to build relationships with everybody. You are not going to keep in contact with everybody, but there are many people with whom you will go through the cohort, become friends for life, and with whom you will always keep in touch. In some situations cohort members will do whatever they can to help me out and I would do the same them. That is something you do not find often and especially when you are in a program like this where everybody is training to be a leader. Most people who want to be leaders are normally like lone-ranger types. They are not collaborative types. This program forces you to be a collaborator. Looking back on the experience as a whole, I feel that I will come out having very good relationships with the vast majority of the people in the group despite some of the conflict that we experienced along the way. My cohort program has helped me grow and learn how to work with many different types of people. The lessons I have learned prepared me with relationships I have in future professional experiences.”



“As a leader in any organization, you must look at the whole picture. You are the person who sets the course, guides the staff, and is ultimately in charge. If you do not start doing that now, if you do not start noticing those trouble-spots, those rough spots in your own personality, those avenues for bringing people together, and do not start acting like a leader now, then it will be harder later. Sometimes situations are difficult and this leadership development program is a training ground for personal development. Relationships, particularly in the cohort experience, are significant. I developed close friendships within my cohort. Many of them, as well as some of those in the prior cohort, are people I will seek out in the future in terms of obtaining a position. In the future, I may hire people from my cohort or ask if potential candidates are interested in a position. I see that happening in other cohorts. My cohort has been helpful in getting me through the process. One of our cohort members just advanced to candidacy. It was neat to see him make that step. Witnessing that, I know it is doable and that my next step is just around the corner.”

“The personal growth I have experienced in learning from outstanding people has contributed to me personally and professionally. I have significantly grown as a person and have thoroughly enjoyed all of the people in my cohort. There are just some incredibly talented people. The team concept of our cohort makes a big difference in how we work together. Our cohort allows students to make friends easier and share experiences with fellow colleagues, some of whom are very experienced, professional, and knowledgeable. This makes it a lot easier to go through graduate school versus other programs that do not have cohorts. Cohorts also foster future networking relationships. I

can definitely see happening among my colleagues. One of the highlights of my experience has been the relationships I have developed with the people in my cohort. The community of people in my field is a very small, relatively exclusive club. I am certain that I will see these folks over and over again throughout my career. I consider that a good thing. A number of them are people with whom I would love to work in an actual employment situation as opposed to just our less formal group projects in our cohort.”

“The cohort writes monthly reports as a team effort. There is a research component that includes recording a personal journal of mental and academic process and progress. Students are asked to describe how the project was accomplished, lessons learned, insights into the process, and feelings about the progress that was made in accomplishing the goal. That allows for a lot of self-reflection. This is a tool for personal use later when you pick up that journal and say, ‘Wow! This is how far I have come.’ It is amazing to see the progression of what you were thinking before and what you are thinking now. This pattern may influence future decisions. Since my cohort has eighteen members, there are eighteen different perspectives. The monthly reports are only one facet of the group rapport we build. We do a lot of group work and have cultivated and grown our relationships over time. This also means that the original group of eighteen has migrated into cliques or groups with whom you share a common vision. Some of the cliques are grouped by geographic region and others based upon interests or management style. It is only natural to want to work with people with whom you similar to and feel more comfortable. The people I work with are from the same metropolitan area. I feel very comfortable with them because I know their background and will return to that area

to work with them every day. The cohort experience has also introduced me to new friends in the same field who I never would have met if I were not in this program.”

“This graduate experience has been good for me in terms of making friends and working with other students. There is a certain amount of group work and my cohort is small. Last year, only five people were accepted into the program. When I entered there were eight. While each person came in at different stages of their life, it is a small group of people and we learn from each other. We know each other well and, while there are difficulties, our small group has learned to appreciate our individual talents to blend them together. I cannot say that I loved them all at the beginning, but I really respect everyone now and I like working with them. In that way, I am fortunate. I relate to their personalities. I have made some good friends, mostly women, which I think is nice. Throughout my career, I almost only worked with men. Working with women and doing projects with them has given me a new perspective. One person, who holds an important educational position in town, is pragmatic in approaching projects and I am more theory and research-oriented. We write papers together and I think we are on our third big project right now. It is amazing to work with her; the experience has taught me so much.”

“Relationships with my cohort are important because I will see many of these people each year at conferences after I graduate. So, with everybody I meet here, I want to have a good relationship. In the past, I spent the majority of time strictly limited to my Korean friends, because I felt much more comfortable with them and they know my language. This meant that my closest relationships were with people outside of my department and I was often isolated from the knowledge other people had because I did

not talk to those people in my cohort. With the language barrier, I found it hard to make good relationships with my professors also. I have good relationships with some professors, but not all professors. This year, I decided to change that and spend more time getting to know people from my cohort and building good relationships with every one of my professors. I figured that this was the time to get to know them since I will see them after I graduate. My cohort program contains students from biology and education. I have found that I like my peers as I have spent more time getting to understand their background and experiences. Any frustrations I have with graduate school are usually ameliorated by the friends I have made and the faculty members whom I have contacted. That has made this experience easier to navigate. Most of the students are going through the exact same thing. So, when I am stressed, they are stressed. If they are upset, I am upset. We actually have a lot in common. I did not have that bond when I was an undergraduate because everything was so disconnected and I did not talk to many people in my major. There are also fewer students in the graduate program and I think that makes people grab onto each other more.”

“The interpersonal relationships and support I derived from my cohort makes putting up with some of the hurdles possible. It makes the entire experience more tolerable. I like the cohesive aspect of the team. We work well together, although I am not used to the ‘girl games’ and the detrimental affect it has on the entire experience. It undermines the functioning of the group and affects how much we get out of the group experience and the learning experience as a whole. In my former profession I did a great deal of group project work, so I am used to some of this, but not to this extent. Maybe it

is because some students feel like they have to compete in this academic environment. People also work in relationship to one another in different ways. I think it is just an intuition thing. Some people are very frank and very straightforward about where they stand on issues and stuff like that. This is also why relationships are important in graduate school. You cannot get by without at least one or two friends. I have a couple of friends. I was very, very selective in choosing who I would work with in my classes. With the other people, it is really hard, because we are all part of a cohort; we have to work together. Overall, the cohort experience is positive because we are each here to accomplish a similar goal and that smoothes out the rough patches.”

“During the summer, we spent two months sharing our insecurities. There are points in class where we cried and others when we laughed. That just created cohesion and congealed us together so we would help each other out like family. The problem with that is that we knew too much about one another. You soon realize that some people will be more aggressive behind your back to get ahead. So, certain reputations are being built on specific people within the group. I stay away from that, but some people in the group thrive on it. In another way, though, it is a safe environment, theoretically. Once you get out there in a job, it is not going to be safe because people are not going to be as cordial as most of us are. Some people are not going to want to work with your program because it is not their program. It is going to be more cut-throat out there than it is here. Not that it is cut-throat here, but it will be a lot more so there because, here you have a lot more support, as far as making decisions than you would have in a working environment.”

“In one sense, our cohort is like being a member of a fraternity. In my college fraternity some people supported one another and others did not. Some have their own agenda and others who embraced the fraternity’s agenda. In a sense, we do the same thing because we all go through the same indoctrination process. We have the same goals, dreams, and ambitions. We have an opportunity to choose the route in which we get there. Some choose the collaborative route, some choose to step on whomever they need to, and others do whatever they have to in order to get their Ph.D.. Not that they step on people, but they see it as a necessary evil. Some students do not believe they have to nor do they choose to form relationships. They just want to do whatever they need to do to get the letters. In my case, I am more of a collaborative person. I prefer to build relationships with people. So, to me, the cohort process is a good situation. In fact, it is ideal because you form relationships because we are a team. We work on projects together and take classes together. We help each other out. If I am doing some work or some research and I see something I know somebody else is looking for, then it is natural for me to pull that information for them as well. If we were not in a cohort, we may not know what other members were researching, what they were trying to accomplish, or what they wanted to become. I would not know as much about them and I certainly would not know them as intimately as I know some members of my class now. That makes our relationships even stronger. Relationships in the cohort help you get to where you want to go. You begin to realize that you will work with these people for the rest of your life. My cohort has taught me a great deal about myself and others. There are people I will work with forever and others I never want to work with again. You learn this when

you are in the cohort. That is good, because eventually you will write papers, do research, work on commissions, and hold leadership positions. Unless you develop relationships, you will not move up, get papers published, or be invited to participate in a big way.”

“Earlier in the semester, I missed two classes because I had to go out of town for professional development. I did not know anyone in the class. I asked a student for her notes, but she said that she did not take good notes and did not feel good sharing them with me. I just felt like it was a competitive thing, because the professor told us that the course is competitive and that others in the class will try and be better than you. As a result, our cohort just spilt up and became less helpful and more competitive. Now, I have three people in my cohort whom I can count on and who are willing to help me. I also have a family. I am married and I have three children. They help me propel forward and do what I have to do. They are very understanding; Mom must study. If I did not have their support, I probably would not make it. My family deals with my crying and staying up all night. I started in January, so my relationships with the cohort are new. I was fortunate because I was able to meet some of the cohort the previous fall, but I did not build a relationship. It was merely going to dinner and saying, ‘Hi, how are you.’ The relationships in this particular cohort are very pressured. There is some sensitivity in the cohort because there is so much work to do and so many things that must be done.”

“I do not spend much time on campus so I do not have the kinds of relationships other students have. Also, my program is not a cohort program so those bonds are not built with a cohort or people who come here full time. There are a few people, though, with whom I have taken classes multiple times and it is always nice to see a friendly face.

Some classes have group projects. Yet, I do not feel that I have deep relationships with my classmates or any kind of relationship with students outside of class, except the relationships required to complete a course. People who are in cohorts have told me about their experience and, while I sometimes wish I had those bonds, other times, I am glad I do not. Those people in cohorts have described some of their relationships as disempowering or difficult. They explain that cohort members often have a different view of the world and you have to look at the world through their lens instead of trying to look at the world through your lens. This is good, but their group projects are not always collaborative. The group must work together to accomplish a singular goal, but when people look at the world in a completely different way, it is hard to finish a project. Since I have a family and a full time job, I am not at the college as much. So, I just want to finish my degree. I am not sure that I could manage dysfunctional relationships in a cohort. In group projects assigned in my classes, I must be intentional in trying to make things work, coordinate schedules, and hold the group together so that we finish. Sometimes diverse opinions and diverse viewpoints separate everyone and affect the outcome and that only leads to a negative result.”

“The new president of my college and I get along very well. She referred me to the program. Then when I got here, I learned that this program is about maintaining positive relationship with everyone. We are also a cohort program where we are required to go full-time. We all attend the same classes for the first year. We are forced to create relationships and we are together almost all the time. We learn how to work with people who are not like us. We all come from different backgrounds. I did find that I needed one



good friend that I could tell everything to, all of the stuff that frustrates me. I have one person with whom I tell everything so that I am not venting my frustration in front of the others. She is in my cohort and I think she uses me for the same thing. That way we do not get in trouble. We have seen other people get in trouble. Maybe they feel better, but nobody else feels better. We work together.”

“I have met people I might not have met otherwise and it has been a rewarding experience. Some of my classmates have families and I worry about them. This has led me to grow in some respects. At the same time I have developed some close relationships with people in my program. I think all of us in my program resent those in the cohort experience that others have in this college because they start off together and take classes together. People in our program are lucky if we end up having any classes together. There are a few of us who just happened to take the same classes together and so we have just naturally developed a really close relationship. There is a general sense of, not resentment, but jealousy that our program is not set up in a cohort because I think it would be really nice to develop a stronger relationship. Due to time and scheduling, it is not always easy for the group in my program to talk outside of class and learn little things about our classmates and their personal lives. Any time that there has been an experience for classmates to get together in our program, for happy hours or to party at a professors’ house, it has really been nice. Many of us make an effort to go since this is the only time that we get to see our classmates as just people enjoying themselves versus students struggling in class.”

“The relationship with faculty bonds the cohort together; we get to know them well. They get a chance to know us on a personal level too. They ask about our background and if we have children. They care. They understand where we are coming from and, knowing that, they try to help us develop. But it is not just relationships with the faculty. Relationship building also happens between the students in the program. As a cohort, we come together in the summer and have an intensive, immersive experience. We build strong bonds with one another. That is my experience. Those relationships have helped me perform better. It has helped to have friends. To go through a process as rigorous as this program is and not have relationships would be much more difficult. When you build friendships with people who are in your program and support one another and encourage one another, it just makes the process a lot easier. We do that for each other. The cohort component of our program has run its course; we are now pursuing our own specialization. We still try to support one another. We stay in touch online and keep track of where everyone is in the process. When we send in proposals we kind of just know that we are in the process and we encourage each other along the way. The relationships with cohort members have been helpful and supportive. Even the moral support has been valuable because it is tough to go through the core courses. We found in our cohort that some people have analytical skills and they can help others that do not have those strengths; other people are writers. Each person had a particular strength. Not all programs work together like this, so I feel blessed to have chosen a program that builds relationships in the classroom, among students, and with the faculty.”

“This university has been great because when I was in a doctoral program in another state, our cohort took all of the classes together. This program is structured so that you are in a cohort for the first year and a half. The first three semesters the cohort is together, but then each student selects classes in other colleges within the university based upon their own individual interests. I chose to take all of my outside courses in business and public policy. These experiences not only exposed me to students studying in other disciplines, but I also learned about the latest research outside of my area of expertise; I had opportunities for scholastic achievement that I would never have expected. In one of my public policy classes the professor and I really hit it off well and I was asked to come back and teach at a conference they were hosting. First, I felt special to be selected, but secondly, it was a great opportunity to teach in another discipline and work with people who have a wider appreciation for that whole interconnectedness that occurs in academia. The outside classes were incredible, but the cohort was incredible too.”

“When my cohort finished its group coursework I was out there on my own. I learned to adapt to the rest of the university culture. When we took classes as a cohort; we were always with the same professors. This developed a nurturing relationship and our faculty were more like shepherds. Friends from other graduate schools said that their faculty were more like obstacles instead of catalysts. That was not true in my cohort. When I think back to my undergraduate experience, I was just a number amongst everyone else; but, you know, you just get through. The cohort experience congealed the students and the faculty. I miss that part of the program now that I am finishing my

coursework and working towards my dissertation. Yet, I know that I will see everyone again in the future. As a member of a cohort, the relationships I built were important. We got along together. Since some students took more classes each term and attended school for both summer sessions, a couple of folks who started at the same time have graduated. I knew their confidence and knowledge levels at the very beginning and watched them grow. I sat in on their proposals and their defense. Witnessing their success has been important to me. Even living vicariously through them motivates me. Those friends I have met in graduate school have been special to me and they will be a source of support and inspiration as we move through our careers. The first people I met in my cohort were the glue that held me to our intense schedule, group projects, and travel requirements. Even those who were not in my cohort, but in other cohorts and other departments, have been incredibly supportive. The relationships I developed have made the experience enjoyable and, when it was tough, bearable.”

**When I leave graduate school, my friends will become my professional network.** Relationships in graduate school were described by students as a tool for *networking*. “At this point, they are a student network and an academic network, but when I get a job, they will be a career network. Beyond all that, they are also friends. Connections are important. I am already in the workforce and plan to transition into another position when I complete this degree. The Ph.D. program has helped me to think outside of the box. I have learned how to ask relevant questions. The more inquisitive I become, the more of a challenge I want, and the more I want to be in a position where I will develop. Making connections helps me build a network of people who could help me

transition into positions I want. My department works hard to develop those relationships, although we do not have a formal, organized group. I think we should create a list to get people started in developing a network. We each have resources, experiences, research areas of specializations that we can bring together and create lifelong friendships. My relationships so far have grown naturally, but networks of people who can help each other out in the future would be valuable.”

“Four of us started together in our program; three of us are pretty close. We talk about academics and research. We often go out for ‘emergency’ happy hours. As far as other relationships, I have only recently learned how to network in professional situations beyond academia and in my clinical work, too. Social networking has allowed me to interact, communicate, and impress staff, students and professors. Graduate students have to cultivate relationships because, after graduation, they might need their professors to write letters of recommendation in order to get a better job. In my culture, making friends is seen as a long-term thing and more in-depth, whereas here it seems like relationships are short term and more superficial. In order to get a job and get to know people, there may not be enough time to develop deep relationships, so networking and meeting different types of people who can connect you to other people is crucial to the experience. Otherwise, you may not get to where you want to go. I have learned the value of networking. Networking is an important part of playing the game. If you really want to get a good job you have to have connections. This is something I learned from my husband as well. He went through the graduate experience here too.”

“In my program, networking is part of the process. The professors bring in speakers each week. While they teach us important information, they also serve as a network of people we can contact in the future. Because of the format of speakers, they come in for the day and it is up to us to keep in contact with them and develop in-depth relationships. We know who is coming ahead of time and we get to eat dinner with them the night before they speak. This gives us a chance to get to know them better and understand their perspective. When they speak, we hear more about their experiences and, as they share their story and the challenges they face, we appreciate them on a much deeper level. This type of networking is precious. One aspect of the experience is particularly interesting. As the speakers arrive, I notice that they zero in on different individuals. One speaker at the dinner the night before he presented talked about one of my areas of interest. I talked with him after the presentation the next day. It was not like we had an in-depth discussion, but there was something he observed that connected me with him. He gave me some very encouraging feedback. Some speakers have done that with other individuals, too. The speakers are very observant. Each of them is in a position to hire one of us, so they are looking for people that would be a good fit for them and we are looking for people who would be a good fit for us. Most of them are good judges of people’s character and have a good idea of where we might fit into their organization in the future. It is interesting how those dynamics happen without you expecting them to happen.”

“When you are immersed in the wisdom from the mentors, experiences, travel opportunities, and lectures it is easy to forget that that this is actually the training ground

for what you will do in the future. This is a network. We are building personal and professional associations. It is easy to forget this, because it is a university environment, but the relationships we develop will last a lifetime. I do not think some of the students understand that the obstacles that we face in the program are actually opportunities to begin acting presidential and to learn to be a leader, get to know people, and create a destiny. This is an opportunity to network and to build relationships. My classmates will be great contacts in the future. We share experiences that will bond us in the future. The network and support system we develop will help us through the academic part of school and will help us professionally in the future.”

**The relationships that work are with my family as they do not really have a choice but to love me and me to love them.** *Family* was identified as one of the relationships graduate students had throughout their experience. “My husband and parents deal with my moodiness or neediness at times and do not judge me, doubt me, or expect too much from me. They realize that I am busy and stressed; they love me no matter how I act or what frustration I am experiencing. With regard to friends, the people who understand me best are those who have A) known me for a long time and understand my personality and shortcomings or B) have been through the graduate process or are currently in graduate school. They understand that time is of the essence and do not take it personally if I do not go to a birthday party or happy-hour gathering. I barely have enough time to go to birthday parties and special events with my family. So, I have few real friends and, sadly, I like it that way. I like the realness, genuineness, authenticity I get from close relationships. I would rather have only a few folks outside of my family

who are good people and good friends than a bunch of folks I know little about and who may not be real with me or who may not understand me.”

“My family has been the most influential in helping me through graduate school. Foremost, it is definitely the relationship I have with my wife and my daughter that are the most impacted because, especially then when things start coming down to the wire and I am pressed for time, I shut them out. I do not mean to be unkind, but sometimes I just have too much to do. Fortunately, even though my wife is not happy about it, she understands my situation; she knows this is important. If she knew how poor my time management skills were, sometimes I think she would be pretty pissed at me. Personally, I have a difficult time, because I had an idealistic vision in my head of what it would be like to be a father. In my mind, I was going to have my daughter on my shoulder and we were going to play Frisbee or play on the swings and stuff like that. There has not been, even when I was managing my time well, that kind of free time. She is not old enough to understand why I cannot give her the time she wants. She just knows that daddy cannot see her right now. That loads up the stress, my heart breaks, and I feel bad. Then I feel bad for my wife who then has to contend with a cranky and sad toddler and say to her, ‘Well daddy still loves you; he just cannot see you right now.’”

“I also have a 10 year old. I explain to him that I go to school to get ahead so that he has everything he needs in life. It is all about my kids, although it is difficult to tell a little person that you will be gone at times so that later, in the future, it will help them. It was difficult juggling that relationship, but he is doing better now because he is getting older and he can understand. It is really cool because we do our homework together.



While I work on my homework, he works on his homework. Sometimes he will look at me and ask, ‘What are you studying?’ I will explain concepts to him and he actually gets it, so that is cool. I drive my son to school every morning and make time to see his baseball games. My parents sometimes take care of my son when I am at school. They live five minutes away; it is not too far. That is another important relationship that I must keep together for my son.”

“Being married impacts the graduate experience from the perspective of having enough time to attend to things at home as well as the time needed to work as a teaching assistant or spend with your friends. I definitely get the sense from most of the people I know, that there is a feeling of guilt from never being available since you are never around. I never have enough time to do anything, so all my relationships suffer as a result. It is just one of those things where I try to catch up when I can. I give a lot of importance to family; I am responsible for my family. At the very beginning, I thought that this whole pursuit would absorb more than it is actually doing right now, although it is stressful sometimes. My previous job, though, was so demanding that I spent maybe fifty or sixty hours per week at the office. I traveled so much that I hardly had any time for my family or myself. Now, I make sure that I take the opportunity to interact and enjoy my family, spend time with my kids, and spend time with my wife. My family also demands more of me than they used to because they are isolated here since we are from a different country. They need daddy with them.”

“Since this is my second year, I have become more adjusted to life in the United States. The first semester I arrived, I was so excited about moving here to a new

environment and a new culture. I do not spend much time talking with my family over the phone, although we write each other over e-mail. I have progressed in my program. I completed the qualifying exam last semester and did my oral proposal last January. At this moment, I am relieved and have more time to think about my family. One of my family members is upset with me because I have not kept in touch with him as much as I should. That relationship is not going very well and it impacts my focus on my studies. As a result, I am kind of sad and upset. Graduate school has not been kind to my personal relationships with my family. It has not helped with my relationship with this particular family member either. I sometimes worry if anyone in my family will contact either faculty members or fellow students in my department. My family, in general, has no interaction with my academic life at all. On the positive side, this university has been more friendly and I have been like my armadillo self in keeping my guard up. I have been pleasantly surprised both in my department and outside. I express myself more. I have developed relationships outside the program too; they help keep me together when I need extra support.”

“Some of the relationships with my friends outside of graduate school are very different because they have no idea of the graduate school experience at all. Those relationships are also affected by the graduate experience in that they do not understand that your whole world revolves around the demands of your studies, so it can hurt the relationship. That also relates to family and significant others who do not have a clue about what you are going through. My relationships with close friends and family have been challenged due to time restraints. My sister is moody and she is very needy. When I

am not there, I am a bad sister. My fiancé is very supportive. He went to law school, so he completely understands, although there are times when he wishes I could spend more time with him. My relationships with my family and friends are now very brief. I miss my family. I miss laughing and just hanging out with them.”

“The other major relationship is with my parents, with my family in general. My parents are a great source of support and encouragement. My dad is my biggest cheerleader in terms of getting me through this program. He has his Ph.D. in marketing, so he has been through this process. He has been a faculty advisor, although he stays very hands-off in terms of helping me get through this actual program. When it comes to research or projects or writing, he says, ‘Talk to your advisor. Do what they want you to do.’ He is a huge support behind the scenes on how to deal with everything. He says, ‘If your faculty hold social events, meetings, or research colloquia, go to them. Even if you do not have anything to say, make an appearance, make sure you are seen and be in there.’ Especially when I first entered the program, I did not know anybody. I did not have an advisor yet. I did not know how to get into this web of people. He told me how to do it, ‘You go to all of their meetings, just start showing up outside of the classroom and then you excel in the classroom.’”

**Outside of this program, my relationships are very important to me.** Graduate students who were interviewed discussed the relationship they had with *friends outside of school*. “I have several close friends with whom I stay in constant contact. One of them I have known since junior high. I am from the Midwest and she is still there. I talk to her all the time. We went to high school and college together. I am the godmother of her first

child and I was her maid of honor. We have been through a lot of life experiences together and she has been very supportive of me through the program. Similarly, I have been very supportive of her through her life experiences. If I want to vent my frustrations or if I am excited and I want to brag a little, she is one person I can talk to about the program who is outside of the program; I do not want to brag in front of fellow students. Outside of my closest friend, it is hard to maintain friendships outside of school. I do not have time for a social life. I have a small, close group of friends. We used to teach together at a school. We became very close and we continue to meet once a month for dinner. They are not the type of friends who are needy and want me to always go to the movies with them. They understand. They know I work.”

“I have friends who drive with me on my two hour drive to school at night. They walk around town and keep themselves busy when I am in class. They come so that I do not have to cross the street by myself late at night or drive alone all the way home. Just yesterday, my car stopped halfway back home. I had to get Roadside Assistance to come and tow me all the way to my home another hour away. They fixed my car which was helpful because I have class again tonight and I had to return today. The little things that come up are crazy. My family and friends are really important because I depend on them a lot. Without them I could never succeed in this program. In the future, I want to have a chance to give them something back.”

“I think of my relationships as everyone outside of my graduate experience. So far, relationships have not been a significant part of my graduate experience since I work part time in one place and full time in another. My focus is more on my full-time job than

on graduate school. My friends and my boyfriend are affected by my graduate experience. I just need to make sure that I find time for those relationships. If someone does not bring something to my life, then I have to let the relationship fizzle away or be honest with them straight up and say, 'You know, I am at a different place in my life and do not think I have enough time to invest.' My father and sister have supported me through everything and without their relationship, their friendship and constant support, I am sure my graduate experience would have been or would be much different and more depressing. It can be a very confusing road journeying to the Ph.D. and they help me daily."

"I have a love-hate relationship with all of my relationships now. I know that I need my relationships with family, friends, co-workers but at the same time I know that I do not have the time to devote to them that they would probably like. I am often the object of frustration for friends and family who believe that I do not care about them anymore. They tell me, 'You just do not care about us anymore.' I have tried to fight their disappointment long enough, but I have just given up. I just feel that people who care about me and understand my goals will respect the fact that for this period in my life I will not be as available to them as I would like to be. They will respect me and say, 'He has some goals that are pretty big.' I have a harder time with the people who do not respect where I am in my life. I think that they are just at a different stage in their life and they cannot respect the fact that I have something in my life more important than them. What I struggle with is, at what point do I say, 'You know what? You are causing me more trouble than you are worth.' At some point, I should just cut them loose."

“I do have one outside friendship and I do not know if it will survive graduate school. I really do not know. I did see her recently, but she does not want to hear even the smallest thing about my experience or my dissertation. I do not call anymore, because I do not want to bore her. She works for a computer company. I pretend to be interested in what she does for living, but I have a new life now in graduate school and she can be really explosive. She will say, ‘I do not want to hear about your classes and I am not interested in about hearing what you studied.’ If you are really friends, you can at least pretend to care. I listen to her talk about dirty diapers, runny noses, those things that happen in being a mom. I still listen, but it has nothing to do with my research. Even so, I still pretend to be interested and try to support her. Experience informs the way you relate to people. It also makes you think about your life and the new people you meet in graduate school. I would say that the graduate school experience definitely changes every kind of relationship, inside and outside of graduate school.”

“The importance of relationships has grown more important over time. At first, I tried to hang out with friends, but I found that when I went to a friend’s place to watch a movie, I just watched the time. I think to myself, ‘I could probably crank out an hour of homework if I get out of here!’ I know that is a hard way to look at my relationships, but there is certainly an impact of graduate school on all relationships. Also, being isolated from my husband has been hard. He lives in another state. I have so little time with people that I have begun to realize the importance of relationships. Early on, I lost a very dear friend who called and said, ‘You are just not there for me anymore.’ She was my maid-of-honor. I was just shocked. When it sunk in, we talked and we were able to

reunite that friendship. I realized that not everybody understands this journey. That experience was very difficult. During the first semester, I had some other relationship difficulties. My husband and close friends are far away. That has been very difficult at times, but what is most rewarding are those very dear friends I have met along the way who are part of my journey now. My new relationships have gotten stronger and I am working hard with family and my outside friends who have really been there for me all along.”

“It is important is to keep your senses outside of graduate school. All of my relationships are impacted by graduate school, because it changes the way I relate to my husband, children, parents, students, and friends. I do not have enough time for any of the above. I would have different relationships with them if I were not in graduate school. First, you have your husband, children, parents, and those people who are always there to support and encourage you. My spouse has made a huge difference to me. Then, there are your friends who you have had throughout your life. You need to keep your friendships. They keep you in check and offer a wake-up call to keep your priorities straight. You can call them during a tough week of school or when you get stressed at the end of a long semester. Sometimes you can lose a friendship too if you ignore them. That is one of the hardest things because you have to prioritize and you cannot do it all. Friendships are really hard to negotiate. The change in your life and your schedule makes it hard to find time to see close friends. Besides, people change. Some friendships do not survive major changes as you go to graduate school. As your circle changes, you develop a new circle of friendships.”

## Playing the Game

Playing the Game describes the overt and covert rules that graduate students must follow. For many, Playing the Game represents the hurdles, challenges, and necessary requirements. Within colleges and universities, academic life includes a set of prescribed procedures managed by administration. The subaffinities for Playing the Game are: bureaucracy, knowing the rules, faculty approval, appearing to conform, choosing a committee, and strategic relationships.

**The bureaucracy is a huge part of an academic institution.** Interviewees describe the *bureaucracy* of graduate experience as one of the things they must navigate through school. “When you are at the graduate level and at the mercy of the bureaucracy, you are really in the crunch of it all. You realize that there are hurdles ahead and you must leap over them, but sometimes you fall flat on your face. Playing the game is not about manipulating people and requirements, because that seems nefarious. Most of the game playing is about rules, bureaucracy, and requirements. Since my ultimate goal is not teaching and research, I plan to be an administrator and I already have that type of position. I do not really play the game quite as much. Sometimes I feel that I am missing out on not doing what I am suppose to be doing in my role as a graduate student, but then I become completely okay because I realize that my priorities are in a different place. I am not connected to the graduate school or the graduate school bureaucracy, but I know the game in ways other people have not seen.”

“The biggest bureaucratic mess was at the graduate school admissions. Somehow I put one wrong date on my application and it did not jibe with my resume. They did not



bother to tell me so the holdup remained until two days before the deadline. I had to get this through the bureaucratic maze so I could be admitted. The bureaucracy at the university is a whole different ball game than in business and industry because you have to navigate the bureaucracy just to get registered. You must struggle to get into classes and try to fit the pieces in place in order to get your Ph.D. and make sure the i's are dotted and the t's crossed. They do not teach a class on graduate politics, but it is a huge part of being successful in graduate school and surviving the experience. Oh, it is not an actual game; it is about dealing with the graduate school requirements, people, and bureaucracy. Bureaucratic games are all about red-tape. When you look at bureaucracy and you consider the hierarchical model, you literally have to maneuver to play this game and take the hits. I do not like bureaucracy, which is probably why I am in this program. I would like to get some of the bureaucracy out of public education.”

“The first bureaucracy I faced was when I was admitted to graduate school. I did my bachelor's in another country and then I came to the United States and did my master's in computer science in New York. The graduate school would not accept my transcripts from my country. They wanted me to get my transcripts again. I graduated from the university over thirty years ago and there were no records of my transcripts. They would not let me register for courses. In my country we have bureaucracy for just about everything, so here it was not as bad because the system seems to be well-defined and most things are automated. That helps a lot. Because I was a foreign student, I had to get vaccines. That took longer than usual, but the International Student Office helps students complete tasks. They are well informed and they make the tasks easier to get

though. Overall, the university has had some degree of bureaucracy, but they do a good job in making it invisible. Once you get through the first hurdles, you can register through the Internet and watch deadlines on calendars. The information is available everywhere. It is not bad, I would say.”

“I do not face much bureaucracy in my department, because I knew the faculty and administrators beforehand. When you have friends in the right places they respond quickly. I was particularly shocked to learn about all of the games and the bureaucracy involved in completing paperwork and getting all of the signatures. I think the bureaucracy is a pain in the neck, but I spend most of my life dealing with it and I find it exceptionally easy to manipulate. There are established rules; there are people who carry them to asinine levels and you just learn to work around the rules to make the rules work for you. I would definitely say that the bureaucracy is part of the graduate experience. You recognize that how you conduct yourself provides you with opportunities for research, fellowships, dissertations, and special projects. Part of being a graduate student is recognizing that you are entering a world that is highly political. How you present yourself is part of your job. You cannot run late to school from oversleeping or leave your home in your flip-flops, because you are here for a purpose. You are in graduate school to further your career. This is the game of life. Even though grad school can be fun, sometimes you can lose site of the fact that you are here for some serious work. At the end of the day, the professors will call you Doctor. That carries enormous significance.”

“The one class I wanted to work into my schedule was full. I could not get a place in any other class because of the tier system in my department. We sometimes have to settle for our fourth or fifth choices rather than the first through third choice. That is when I switched to a different field. I received the exact opposite treatment when I went into the new program. The first program only offers classes during work hours, so if you cannot be released from work, and economically cannot quit your job, you just cannot take the class. It is a gate-keeping mentality. They just would not budge. They say that this is the way they have always done it. The class is offered at one time this semester and that is the only time it will be offered. Playing the game in graduate school surrounds the bureaucracy of research and classes. For me, there is pressure, especially this late in my graduate career. I only hope I have a year left. I think I have learned to play the game really well. With playing the game, I am an outlier because I am from a different country. Before coming, I did not know the culture here very well and it took me some time to really understand the culture, the bureaucracy, and student relationships with faculty. I am still learning actually and am having a lot of trouble dealing with the game in graduate school. I used to work for a company and I was able to play the game while I was there. But in graduate school there is a very specific and unique game to play. I do not know this game very well and am really struggling.”

“Playing the game is related to bureaucracy and there is a lot of bureaucracy in graduate school, probably with any school. It was quite frustrating in the beginning. I entered with an idealistic perspective. I was determined to carve my own path and choose the classes that would be significant. You gradually learn that you must take some classes

because they are required. There really is not much compromise. You have to take them even if you do not like the professor or do not like the class. I would say slowly that I learned to manage my frustration.”

“Playing the game to me means knowing what to expect and talking to as many people as possible, finding out exactly what I need to do and what classes I need to take, especially since I work full time, I do not want to take a class where I have to read a thousand pages in a week. So playing the game means navigating around the system, attaching yourself to professors and peers who can give you good and effective advice by helping you get through the process. Those types of conversations are important. As for the bureaucracy at the institution, there are signatures required for courses, comprehensive exams, and specialization papers. There is more. You have to find a topic. As I grow older I realize more and more just how all the details, rules, and bureaucracy play into everything. For instance, in the department with politics it is totally different than family politics. With my family I feel like I can say what I need to and I do not have to pick and choose words as much. I really do stand my ground, but it is different at the university. With the faculty, it is more of this silent understanding and it is not direct. I do not fight it out with them. It is just sort of, okay you are faculty and we either agree or disagree, and still align ourselves together however it works.”

“Bureaucracy is a huge part of an academic institution. When you are at the graduate level and at the mercy of the faculty, the bureaucracy is the crunch of it all. You realize the hurdles sometimes before you have to chance to leap over them and then you fall flat on your face. There is a certain amount of playing the game involved with the

faculty making sure you know your p's and q's. When it comes to dealing with the graduate school officials, I felt certain walls between me and the staff of graduate school. If there was anything about the graduate experience that drives me up the wall and just frustrates me to no end, it is playing the game. Part of it is jumping the hurdles just to stay in the system and make sure that you do not have holds on your account to get registered. I think I age ten or fifteen years every time I go through the registration process because I know that if there are any surprise holds, I may not get the classes I need. When you have a hold on your records you just find out what the hold is for. Sometimes you have to dig pretty deep to find out what it is and how to take care of it, but you just take one step at a time and you eventually solve the problem. It is frustrating, because it is time-consuming and there is a sense that you should not have to be dealing with this on top of everything else. This ultimately impacts the time it will take to get through the entire program.”

“There is always bureaucracy associated with graduate school. There is always the politically correct method of handling things with professors and often times you have to be very careful and watch your step. Even when things are not rosy you paint them that way. For example, there was a workshop not too long ago on dissertations and writing a dissertation. You had to sign up for it in advance. Apparently they had paperwork to give you at the dissertation. It happened to be the time that I needed to go home because of my sister’s situation, so I emailed the person in the graduate school to let him know my circumstances. I asked if one of my peers could pick up a packet at the session since I was not able to be there. She e-mailed me back and said, ‘No, it is not

possible to reserve a packet. Unless you are there personally, you cannot receive a packet.' I e-mailed her back saying, 'I do not understand why you cannot do that.' She never responded to me. I got really annoyed because that just told me that maybe students are not the focus at all. That was probably the most negative experience I have had in terms of the bureaucracy. Playing the game has been really hard. The bureaucracy makes it difficult."

**The unwritten challenges of getting through the program or the political things that go on behind the screens that no one tells you about are part of playing the game.** Graduate students must *know the rules* as they go through the graduate experience. "There are unspoken rules and relationships between students, faculty, and administration. The more you understand people, requirements, and objectives, the better you are able to complete your doctoral program. You cannot complete the program unless you do exactly what you are told, exactly what you need to do. Disobeying the rules is not tolerated. I was particularly shocked to learn that there were so many games in graduate school and bureaucracy involved in getting all the paperwork done. There was as much game playing as there is bureaucracy. In particular, I am talking about the IRB process. Certainly, in terms of playing the game, I need to be very thoughtful about my relationships with the faculty and make sure I know the rules."

"In order to get a good grade you have to follow the directions. There is a saying that says, 'Wherever you go, whatever you think, or whatever everybody does, you must follow the rules and comply with the procedures.' As an older student, your priorities are different. I feel like my time in school really matters and I want my research to matter. It

is harder for me to jump through the hoops or do things that are outside of my belief system or expectation. Playing the game in terms of getting through the rules drives me absolutely crazy. The other aspect of playing the game, particularly in my program, is the game played with the mentors. There is a great deal of deference paid to the mentors. It is not something I do very well. I have to make sure I am not too flippant and too cocky. I have to work at this. In my program you observe the interaction with the faculty and the speakers before you come into the program. You really know what the expectations are. You know the rules; you have to dress a certain way. You have to carry yourself a certain way. You know that when you go to dinner with the speakers you have to conduct yourself professionally.”

“Comparing this program to my master’s program, the philosophies are different, but people say that you have to play a game. I am just a firm believer that if you do what you are supposed to do or what you are charged with doing, there is no game to be played; you do not have to be in the boss’; face all the time smiling, grinning, that sort of thing. Your work speaks for itself. The more that you can find out about the hidden, unspoken rules, the more it should help you. I am at a point where I am stymied. Playing the game includes lots of rules from knowing who to e-mail to get your advising bar removed to who to make relationships with so that playing the game is a little easier. It would be great if you knew the rules up front. Probably the greatest challenge I have heard was when I went to the dissertation workshop. A few professors from all over the university spoke to us during this workshop. They challenged all of the doctoral students not just to work towards getting a Ph.D., but work toward being a Ph.D.. I think that is

the best description of the game. Students must learn how to be a scholar and how to be a doctor and not just have a doctorate. To me, that really speaks to the entire game and the components of the game from a scholarly standpoint and a logistical standpoint. Knowing the rules and working through the requirements to do the research and write a dissertation and then be successful defending your dissertation is a challenge. Every enterprise has its own rules with its own guidelines.”

**There are many instances where you must work with faculty and stay in contact with them.** In order to move forward, *faculty approval* is required. “When you get to the dissertation phase, that is when the bureaucracy really arises. You must get the paperwork signed off. That is what I am preparing for in terms of the bureaucracy. I have had good luck getting to know faculty and keeping in contact with them. If I do not get into a class, the faculty know who I am and know that I am a good student. Other than those types of contacts, I do not feel that I am really playing the game that much. It may also be because I work at the university. So, I really know the games being played. I get the help I need and they allow me into classes and sign off my paper. I know that part of my fees pay for faculty to advise me. I take advantage of this support. Progressively, as I go through the Ph.D. program I find that there is not much of a bureaucracy. I can think of one situation two semesters ago where I am fairly certain the grade I got was because the professor liked me. He liked me because I figured out what he wanted and I tailored my response to him. The rest of the class, who often did not listen, did what they always do and, surprised, they said, ‘Oh crap, look at these horrible marks I am getting’ and I thought, ‘Well he told us exactly what he wanted.’ As far as school politics and



bureaucracies I honestly have not come across anything that has been an impediment. Part of that might be because I come from a military background. That is a huge bureaucracy, so I am used to working within specific rules and those sorts of constraints. It is not like I am busting at the seams. It is the university framework and I have to do what I have to I do.”

**There is always the politically correct method of handling things with professors and often times you have to be very careful and watch your step.** In the graduate experience, students *appear to conform* to whatever people require. “Even when things are not rosy, you must paint them that way. I am learning that it is more important to have a good relationship with your professors than to reveal your real and true opinion. I ensure that I respect the right people. You must manipulate your writing to meet their standard, which is to be expected, but it is also to agree with their points of view. Before I came here, I disagreed with people I worked for and with, and nobody got excited about it. I get the impression here that faculty talk about academic freedom, discourse, interchange of ideas, but they do not mean it. Some do, but many do not and they want you to agree with them; it creates a negative experience, but that is what is expected. You start learning very quickly whose toes you are stepping on and it seems like the more advanced you get or the further into the program you are trusted with more information. You hear more stuff. You hear more about the politics. Professors trust you by telling you things that, at times, you do not want to know because now you know things you do not want to know and must decide whether or not to say anything. You have to please the professors. You watch what your boss is asking and always do what you are told, but now

the boss is your professor, a faculty member. Whatever a faculty member wants must be done.”

“I wanted a professor to be more interested in my work, but he became ill and put a graduate student assistant in to teach the class. She did not like what I was doing, and she thought it was misguided. She did not tell me why and it was difficult for me to be diplomatic. If there is an egomaniacal faculty member, you would approach that person differently than someone who was a little more laid back and comfortable with you and how you could relate to them and on what kind of level. You have to play the game knowing how to approach different people. By playing the game, I mean buttering up the professors and going in and throwing yourself on their mercy. Sometimes professors can be very strict about things and you see it from a different perspective. If you do not do it their way, you are not going to get as good of a grade. They have so much influence that it drives people to suck up to them for a lack of a better term, to do whatever it is that they want to do to conform their conduct and their learning experience to it. As far as playing the game with the faculty, I find it silly and ridiculous that given the level of professionalism, the level of pay, the level of experience that you have to take care of their care and feeding. It seems silly. It seems unprofessional. It seems like professors come up with new things every time I go talk to them. I care about how professors see me. I have found that there is a segment, although not a large segment, but a very powerful influence, that if you do not get along or if you disagree then you cannot disagree without being wrong. You cannot disagree without it offending someone and it is not an exchange of ideas, it is not agreeing to disagree, it is taken as a personal slight.

To the individual's credit, in the one case where I needed major work with the system, the faculty and the staff worked well and basically fixed the problem. I feel like they did it because it was their job. They just did their job because I asked them. I know the people who run our programs are forced into a lot politics and a lot of game playing on their own that sometimes has a trickledown effect on us as students."

"My own motivations now are unlike when I was in school the two previous times for the sheer joy of learning. This is a more end-oriented exercise. I just want to know, 'What does it take to finish?' In my previous educational experiences, I also experienced playing the game. I get very nervous and stressed toward the graduate experience I am going through right now. My priorities are to go on and finish my course work, which will lead me to start on my dissertation. I would put it this way, with this program I must hold back and discuss my career aspirations. You can be a survivor and get you where you want to be. Playing the game is hard for me, I am just too hardheaded. I need to back off it a little. I need to play the game more, talk more, visit them during their office hours, ask for their opinion, tell them that I do not want to bug them, but I want to know what they think about something. When I feel I have to play the game and not really liking it that creates stress for me; it creates anxiety and some level of irritation. But as far the hurdles, I am drafting a letter right now and I am actually just going to send it to the president of the university and copy it to other people because I am actually quite tired of playing the game. Actually, for that particular situation, the courses are not being offered when working people need to take them. I hate conforming and being fake. I do not like

myself at that particular moment. I hate playing the game, but what I hate the most is that I am getting good at it.”

**If you want someone on your committee, you must take his or her course and you definitely have to try and impress them as well.** *Choosing a committee* is one aspect graduate students refer to when they talk about playing the game. “When I chose my committee members, I had to think hard about my relationships with them and their relationships with each other. So, I think it is very difficult. If a particular faculty member’s class was full, I would wait. Finally, it would come to the point where I would email the professor and say, ‘I have tried to get into your class six times’ and they would say, ‘Okay, I will let you in.’ I waited every time. If I could not get that one then I would take another one and wait. I remember one of the professors for my orals said, ‘How did you get these great faculty?’ I had a strategy. You want to put your best foot forward, particularly with people who have a perceived control over your career.”

“You have to find committee members who are willing to serve on your committee. I was directed to a new faculty member who I did not even know. So, faced with starting my dissertation process, it was like being put on a ping pong on a table popped from one faculty member to another. ‘Well that is a great topic, but I am too busy. You should find another professor,’ or ‘Thank you, but I am not really interested in that area, but there are other people who are.’ Frankly, I did not want to find a faculty member I did not know and with whom I had not taken any coursework. If I was not familiar with them and they were not familiar with me or my style, how could they really

serve on my committee? I did not want to be the guinea pig and have them evaluate my dissertation.”

“You have to learn how to manage your committee and understand how to work with and treat your dissertation chairs. It is learning to understand the politics of graduate school. You have to learn how to manage anxiety and stress and still maintain these relationships with colleagues and professors in a professional manner. That is difficult. You still have to work with people like them in the real world. Understanding the politics and what it means to have a dissertation chair is a huge learning curve. There are only a handful of faculty to choose from and there is nobody else. After that, you must worry if a person you choose will give you the time of day to actually go through this process with you or they are only going to say, ‘Well, I will do it, but I am going to give you a hard time.’ You need to know how to take the hits and roll with the punches so that you can ultimately accomplish your goal and finish.”

“If one committee member dislikes me or disapproves of me, I will not get my degree. That means that I must first work on the relationships with each committee member. Another point is that the relationship between the members is also very important. If their relationship together is not good, they may want to show off in a committee meeting. It is a careful balance. You do not want one member to have greater responsibility than others or ask too much of the committee. Also, you cannot please every faculty member and yet, you do not want to appear worthless in their eyes. Basically, while this never would have crossed my mind, because I thought I was simply supposed to pick professors I liked. I was told not to choose a junior professor as the head

of the committee. The thinking is that if other committee members have seniority, then it will not work out. The chair has to be higher up in position and status than the committee members. I am older than some of the professors. I have been teaching higher education for thirty years, so I have as much experience, probably more than some of them. I have been fortunate; both my advisor and an informal advisor have been very helpful.”

**Who should I take? What should I do?** Playing the game requires creating *strategic relationships*. “I remember asking everybody who I should take before I signed up for classes. If two or three people said the same person, then that is who I took. I also wanted to know who else registered for that class, because I wanted to make sure that if the professor assigned a team project, the team members were reliable and disciplined. Team members’ work would affect my grade. If they have a problem, I may have to pull their weight or support them. Meanwhile, all of that is being watched by faculty who impact the outcome of my degree. I think there is game playing involved. There is no question that we have to play a game. I think I have an advantage over some people. I watched my brother-in-law who was a chair for a department of educational administration mentor graduate students for twenty-five years. I saw the administrator’s side of the situation I face. I have an idea of what to expect, what to do, and what not to do. I know the major faux pas. I am trying to avoid those. I would love it if a student would be honest with me and come to me and tell me that what they do and do not like in class. I would not think anything bad of them and I would respect them.”

“Based upon your relationships, faculty and students peg you as being part of a certain group. That matters because they perceive all of the groups differently even

though they probably tell you they do not. You have to play the game with your peers. The peers you hang out with and the peers you utilize in the pursuit of your degree must be strategic in that aspect. You really have to lean on them, especially the people ahead of you. When I was in my master's program in Illinois, I went to a meeting for incoming graduate students. The woman gave us some tips on how to play the game and then suggested that we read the book, Getting What You Came For. It is a guide of getting through a graduate school program. I bought it and read it cover to cover. That book was very helpful. When I got into the Ph.D. program, I read it again the summer before I started. That whole book is about playing the game. It gives you some basic information on what to expect and tips on how to approach faculty. I combined what I learned from my dad, that book, and tips from my advisors. The main thing you have to do is just listen. Faculty and administrators will tell you how to get through and play the game. Even that first year, you have to reel yourself in. Do not fight with faculty on certain issues; just know when to do what you are told.”

“You have to be savvy. Some faculty members will drive you up a wall. My dad has been a huge wealth of information in terms of playing the game. Getting through the coursework and getting through the program has been very straightforward. I just followed the steps. But, it was always about what was behind my back or behind the curtain that was difficult for me. I began to connect with advisors by helping them on their research. Whatever project they need help on, I just helped them with whatever they needed. Suddenly, I become an invaluable resource to them. Even if their research focus was not in the same realm as yours, it was still good experience. Currently, I am actually

working on three major research projects. One of them is my research. I am the lead researcher and my mentor is assisting me. Two of them are in areas of faculty interests and I just help them. I want to do research, so I am playing the game, but I enjoy what I am doing. I am getting papers written but I let the faculty member direct where the research and writing is headed. That is okay. I do not have to be in charge of everything. I am a bit of an alpha personality, but I do not have to have control of every single thing that happens. You must recognize that being in graduate school, there is some drudgery work you have to do, whether that is reading an additional assignment, rearranging another diagram, or preparing another paper, you have to remind yourself that, as a teacher, you also assign things that you feel are important. Maybe your students do not see the connection, but it develops you as a grad student.”

“Last week I had to turn in my chapter two and it came back for review. Basically, I made a political faux pas when I turned in the chapter and one of the reviewers went off. They were not going off on me, but on my advisor. I went into his office. It was cute. I got the whole lecture, ‘Well you realize that this was a big deal.’ I just bit my tongue and complained about this reviewer to my friends. When I go into that office, I must be professional and pretend the critique is the best thing that could happen to me in the world and take it to heart. I know my position. I am lucky because my sister is also in academia and I see her playing the game, too. Finishing my doctoral degree is not easy. I have three supervisors for my jobs and one for my dissertation, so managing them harmoniously is not easy. It is really hard to understand them individually and to manage these relationships. Helping faculty finish projects is the game in a nutshell. You



want to be the student that they think of when they have a project. Even if it is extra work, it is worth the time and effort because it pays off. Your resume will be longer than your classmates. While I may seem like I have a cynical viewpoint, getting jobs and opening doors is all about the length of your CV. It is not about the quality of the experience, it is not whether you enjoyed the work, it is not even about whether you liked those with whom you were working; it is about the length of your CV. So, in my third year here, faculty know the quality of my work and they can lean on me. If they know you do good work, you put on more projects than you can handle. That goes back to life management. You have to know when to tell people that you are at your limit. You definitely want them thinking of you. I would rather have them know me and be overworked than not know me and have free time.”

“The idea of playing the game is important. It is one of my weaker areas at this moment. I love speaking with people and getting to know them, but I do not want to form artificial relationships. You have to play the game because your faculty and peers need to know who you are. I do not feel comfortable going specifically to speak to the professor just because it is part of the game, but I know I should. At each step of the process you are playing the game. At the very beginning of the process, orientations are essential. If you are well-oriented and you know where you are going, you have a better idea of how will get there. But, even when you know the right people, different personalities and different people define the group’s interaction. There are formal ‘rules of engagement’ and there are informal rules. For example, some people are not ‘huggers’. Do not try to

hug a person who does not want you in their space. Some people have a very specific way they believe two people should interact.”

“When you are in a cohort with people every single day working for long hours closely together, these rules are very important. The next set of rules of the game involves time. Some people’s clock is different than another’s. For example, some people are morning people and some are night people. Some people are very early, some come on time, and some come late, although in a cohort tardiness is rejected in a very overt way. Projects must be submitted by a specific time, in a specific way, or else it simply does not happen and the outcome is bad. If you understand people’s timing, you have a distinct advantage. If you make a mistake in timing, it could throw off your entire cohort and ultimately, your doctoral experience. Graduate school is a political environment. Every environment is political, every game has its rules; you have to play them. Do some of the rules piss me off? Yes, but if it pisses me off enough then I actively work to change it. That is why I have become a leader and position myself as a change agent so that the rules can change in a positive way to help future generations of students. It is about jumping through the hurdles, but also about understanding that just because that is the way it currently is, that is not the way it always has to be. It is important to play the game, not just take crap for the sake of accepting crap, although sometimes you have to take it and that is fine.”

## Growth and Transformation

Growth and transformation reflects the personal development that takes place during graduate school. Students learn throughout school in many aspects of school and life. The subaffinities of growth and transformation are: intellectual and academic growth, social growth, emotional growth, professional growth, and practical experience.

**While my graduate degree will not advance my career, I will obtain a sense of satisfaction as I grow academically and intellectually.** Students identify *intellectual and academic growth* as part of their transformation. “The growth that comes from this education is not so much about time management, the growth is about expanding my mind to become a better scientist, thinker, and researcher. I am more critical about what I read and the papers I write. My career has always been in program management and financial controls. In this field, a Ph.D. will not advance my career. In fact, if I went to look for a job in the industry with a Ph.D., they would not hire me. I would have to take it off my resume, because I already have numerous undergraduate and graduate degrees. In learning, I grow; it is a personal thing, bragging rights maybe. Somehow I always manage to pull it together. I enjoy the practical learning and the sharing of ideas from other professionals. I discover answers to questions I have always had about leadership and management. I have grown as a learner, I know how to write a paper and read a lot in a short amount of time. My whole focus of the end result of me doing a Ph.D. is growth. I am growing, especially as a scholar. The reward comes at the end when I get to walk across the stage all dressed up in cap and gown. Even if I have a string of A’s or published papers, I will always wonder if I can keep this up and do it again.”

“I essentially torpedoed my military career by taking the academic route. Academia is not frowned upon in the military, but it is not considered a vital military role, especially in the Air Force, as it is run by pilots. If it is not kinetic and you do not drop bombs, then it is not worthwhile. If I see the next rank above where I am now, I will be lucky. I will never have what amounts to a quote ‘successful’ career in the military, but for me that is okay, because I always knew when I went into the military that I wanted a career in academia. My driving force and what is keeping me here is knowing that I am growing and transforming. I have enough faith and confidence that when the time comes, this will all come together because of the things you can not quantify. I am motivated by the knowledge I obtain. I love learning. In high school, hated to read and never read. Now, while I know this sounds really nerdy, I love sitting and reading a book. It is just the coolest thing. I have great excitement in reading people’s ideas. My biggest regret is that I do not have time for reading. So, every day I regret the time I missed reading, because knowing what is in the literature is such a huge part about this experience. It is fascinating to know that someone thought about these ideas already and formulated a theory. Sometimes I am disappointed in my classmates who do not want to discuss the ideas and have not read the assigned work. Even so, I enjoy my classes. I learn a great deal and have developed a knowledge base. The classroom setting is collaborative. I pick up strategies from individuals and internalize their impact. I have gone to organizations and said, ‘This is a tool we need; my department needs consider this project.’”

“My ability to write and express myself has improved tremendously. I wrote a paper for a class, turned it in, and it was accepted to be published. I have also gained knowledge about group learning and ways to help students learn the field better. I love the readings; I like to write; I love to research. While I grow and transform, I become even more passionate about intellectual pursuits and simply learning. I believe in being a lifelong learner, although this is an expensive way to accomplish that goal. I do not know if I have transformed much, but that is the goal. I have more confidence and it is a million times easier. I have grown accustomed to the amount of work I have to do. It is not a shock to be assigned two hundred pages every week. I feel so many changes in managing my course load. By taking classes and conducting research, I have increased my knowledgebase and can enjoy the benefits. Through this process I am preparing for my future as a researcher. I am growing in terms of knowledge and information and I am transforming how I view academics. I believe growth and transformation happens slowly and gradually. I rarely notice it, but I am quite sure that by the time I graduate, I will know more. School only teaches knowledge, not personality. For me, it is almost entirely intellectual. I know my faults and must improve. Growth is an intellectual exercise. Even though most of my coursework is behind me, each time I take a class, I learn from reading the material, from my peers, and from my professors. I am learning HTML and webpage design. I know it is not my calling, but I am learning the information. I am taking classes online, faculty development classes on Blackboard, and I did not know any of this before. I like to learn.”

**The growth is scary because I must deal with the reality of maneuvering through people when I cannot control them.** *Social growth* is one aspect of graduate student life that has to do with learning to adapt to the environment and work in concert with others. “The graduate experience has been more a social training ground than academic. I have found that people do not always have good intentions. Some will do what they need to do to get themselves ahead. So, I should not take comments or actions personally. It is a game. I have got to get through to graduate. I am learning, for lack of a better term, that not everybody tells the truth, there is an immense amount of politics, and there is a certain pettiness in the college environment. Faculty talk about being student-centered, but the bureaucracy, and to some degree, other aspects of the environment, are not. I find this frustrating. During the last four years, I have worked hard on being patient or rather God has been working hard on my patience; I am not sure which. I guess I should take this as God’s little hint that I have not learned quite enough about patience yet. I need to be more accepting of things as they are and not as they should be. I am still not very good, but I am better now than I was twenty years ago. I can also see that there are people who, in fact, work in these types of environments very well. Despite other things I have said, there are many people here who are brilliant and will make major contributions. Seeing outside of fairly localized areas has been a massive help to me. The experience has been confusing; I do not know what I want to do when I grow up.”

“When I first decided to enter this program, I sat down and I listed the things I needed to work on. The number one deficiency I identified was how to handle criticism better. I used to get so upset when people questioned me. The growth that has taken

place, and it was much needed in my life, was to be able to have people criticize me or have people disagree with me and be okay with that and to be okay with myself. You must be confident enough in your talents and abilities and recognize that when others do not agree they are not criticizing you personally, but criticizing the perception of the position or the power you have. This perception is just one opinion, so I try not to take it personally. That forces me to grow. Whether it is growth because it is uncomfortable or growth because it is a new way of thinking about a situation or experience in which I am very comfortable, it just gives me another opportunity to build my strengths. I see growth happening both through a stressful situation and where I perceive a source of strength. When I can capitalize on my strengths I can improve and even in very difficult situations, I can find something positive and good can come out of it.”

“Graduate school is a training ground, so if you do not start modeling the kinds of behaviors you want to emulate now, well you cannot finish this program and begin implementing personal and social change. I used to tell the students I taught who did not want to plan, ‘You cannot graduate today, put on a suit tomorrow, and succeed in an interview because people are going to realize you feel uncomfortable in those clothes.’ It is the same thing here. You cannot expect to start being a leader once you graduate, because it will not feel natural or comfortable to you. You are more likely to reveal your true self in the interview and look like you are just putting on a show for them. So, you must start practicing now. That is why I say this is a training ground for behaviors we should begin so that we are prepared once we get out. Even though I might not realize it, I am growing in the process and am becoming a stronger person. I certainly hope I am

becoming more educated. I am being put in positions that are not necessarily comfortable to me and I have grown.”

“The situation with my family, particularly with my sister, has helped me keep things in perspective. When things get stressful, when there is group conflict, I take a step back and ask myself, ‘What is really important in life?’ Some things that happen in graduate school are petty when compared to other circumstances in your life or what other people are going through. Having your perspective change about what is important in life is all about growing. Who I am now versus who I was when I came here two years ago for May intercession are two completely different people. I have grown; I have matured. With the experiences in this program, you have no other choice but to grow. You meet so many people who really have an impact on the way you think, the way you want to conduct yourself, and where you could be down the road. Unconsciously, those people you really like, you take a little bit of them and start modeling those behaviors. You see some people and you think, ‘Wow, this guy is really good,’ and then you see somebody else who is talented and knowledgeable and you model some of their attributes too. You start thinking, ‘Once I finish this program and I am in one of those positions, what kind of leader would I like to be?’ So, I kind of take a little piece of one person, a little piece of another person, a little piece of a third person and start forming who I want to be in my next position. As you acquire knowledge, you grow. I look at things entirely different now. The biggest thing I have realized is that I do not have to like everybody. Just because I work with an individual, does not mean I have to like them. We only have



to work together. So, my social growth is that I do not have to be friends with everybody.”

“If you do all that you are supposed to do and do it to the best of your ability, that is all you can do. You cannot beat yourself up about it; you cannot drag yourself over the coals. Also, it is important to realize that everybody is different; everybody has their own agenda; everybody does not think like you; everybody does not believe in the things you believe in; and, some people are very selfish. You just have to let those people be and you have to let those kinds of things go. You just have to understand that you are going to encounter people like that throughout life. As you go through the process of becoming a leader and as you move in the ranks, there will be people who will work for you, people that you will work with whom you are not going to agree. But, you also must remember that you have a purpose and that purpose is what is important. It is not important if you like or dislike that person or if you get along with that person, but that you work toward that same goal and the goal is the betterment of the institution, company, or organization by ensuring that constituents get what they need. It is not about you; it is about them.”

“Some of my learning comes from my parents because they encouraged each of their children to go to school and have it better than they had. Over the course of my time here, I have moved from being my parents’ child to an adult. My growth as a researcher is a conflicted relationship because I have had to sacrifice my family life. I have also managed my time, money, and life because what I do impacts my relationships. This experience helped me to make school an enjoyable experience and helped me grow in my relationships with my family. Although I have many assignments and I am away from

home, I think it has helped. Relationships with faculty have helped me grow as well. My advisor has had a great influence on me. Developing relationships with faculty as well as my colleagues within the cohort have given me strength in knowing that yes, I can get through the program successfully. In the workforce, working with people who have Ph.D.s and have written books, you can feel inferior. This program helps lift us beyond that fear because we all go through transformation and we all must multitask. My classmates have helped me grow and, while sometimes supportive and other times challenging, they have taught me about myself. Peer relationships are very much connected to growth. Without these relationships, I am unsure how much growth occurs. The people around me are amazing. One lesson I learned is that the outcome does not have to be my way. When people present different viewpoints, the group can arrive jointly at a better solution. Working with others is a tremendous lesson in cooperation, scheduling, and collaboration.”

**I have probably grown more as a person in the past two and a half, almost three years, than I have, from a baby.** Students describe their growth in handling the various situations they encounter as *emotional growth*. “I have become more tolerant, especially of my students and more forgiving. Not that I did not forgive, but my perspective has changed. I am now a very forgiving person. I understand how life can impact academics and I am less likely to jump to conclusions. I realize that other people have issues with their home, family, friendships, and responsibilities other than school work. So, if my students cannot deal with what they need to deal with, or they are a little bit worried, I have a lot of empathy now. I understand if they are frantic. I listen more

intently and think about the consequences. I have transformed from a person who is certain of the way things are to a person who does not know everything. My cognition about the way things are has changed. I am more diplomatic with regard to both my personal and professional life. I get less frustrated and have become more patient. Many things I used to handle one way, I now handle differently. I have noticed other growth opportunities too in my way of critically analyzing an issue and how I work with others. My emotional growth can be seen in my ability to endure and think positively about situations. Difficult situations that used to make me angry or upset are now opportunities to step back and consider all of the alternatives and not assume what lies on the surface.”

“My ability to manage stress by ‘groaning and transforming’ has improved. I have gone pretty far down the path in my ability to not be quite as emotionally attached to ideas. Before, this limited my ability to assess and consider other points of view in discussion and deliberations about issues. The graduate experience has helped me tremendously because, you cannot be emotionally attached to your ideas or you will get beat up. The discussion has to be vigorous about the ideas on the table. That is why people come and enjoy the experience. That is the fun part of being in graduate school. The other piece is that you are forced to take courses that present a particular point of view that you would not necessarily take and go into the details of that point of view to try and understand that perspective. One of the things I have learned is that some ideas that I held as absolutely true, especially with respect to the interaction of businesses, policy, and government, have many layers of interaction, which is refreshing and

confusing. I have learned that knowledge and growth can come out of stressful situations.”

“The major transformation I have undergone has been long, consistent, and interesting, particularly as I reflect upon how much effort was expended in the process. I struggled before I entered this program, especially, with my emotions and stress. Those people who have only known me since I started this program see me now, a few years later, and they see a bigger jump than just A to B. They watched a nervous, stressed out, frustrated student enter and now they look incredulously at me and see my confidence and joy. I am on the upswing attempting to even out my exuberance so that it does not spike and drop in the future. I feel more like me now than I did when I started. When I began I felt off-kilter. That would stress me out even more, because I was not behaving like who I am and that would frustrate me more. The people who have always been there for me, like my friend up north, can see that I am back. Some people here think I am a lot happier and fun too. In the beginning, I had a hard time with my emotions. I worked with certain people and it was so difficult for me. I would think, ‘Gosh, this is just so bad.’ Then I realized, ‘Wait, hold on. This is not bad. I am having a hard time because my perception is one way and others think differently. I have this personality; they have that personality.’ I was able to learn from that and once I developed a new perspective, I would just go ahead and do what needed to be done. It was almost like organizational design. I needed to see how I fit into this organization.”

“The self-exploration I have undergone as part of this process has allowed me to detach emotionally. I have control of my emotions and my thoughts. These can only

control me to the extent that I allow. Each of us has the power to write our own life script. Coming to that realization is part of going through this process of living school, attending school, and becoming school in many ways. One of the keys for me is ensuring that I have a constant focus on my growth and transformation and realizing that this is what it is all about. For me, there is nothing else. Yes, the demands of the program have helped to strengthen me. In the first year of my cohort, we had some very difficult challenges. Sometimes I was the one having to work with people to help guide the group through our problems in order to resolve them. Sometimes that was very painful. Personal attacks caused me to become stronger and learn that people will attack you even if you are not bad. They just attack. I had to learn to walk through that and not let everything hurt me the way it might have before. Although painful, that was a growth-oriented, transformational experience. I have grown up internally. At times I suffered and felt so alone. I was just beside myself. I cried and cried until I finally just grew up. I felt that I left a part of me in my hometown. My emotions do not have control of me now because I am in control and I have learned from the varied experiences I have encountered.”

**The biggest area of growth for me encompasses the art of teaching.** *Professional growth* is often described as a factor in their graduate school experience. “As a teaching assistant, I have the opportunity to teach at the university while also learning from faculty. This has made me more of a professional and less of a student. I have been working on my Ph.D. for seven years, so I have had many years to become a better teaching assistant and evaluate the best and worst in teaching from faculty. No

matter what discipline the professor was in, I could take their best practices and apply them to my teaching. I have gained a broad perspective into how faculty approach their subjects. I strive to get to know my professors and understand their purpose, research, and teaching. Teaching has transformed the way I participate in class, approach a teacher after class, and schedule my semester so that I complete all of my assignments. I want to be a great teacher because I was changed in teaching. It took me a semester, maybe in the first class I took, where the professor made me think about what was important to me and the preconceived notions I brought to class. This changed my outlook on how to create transformation in the world, but this educational experience has definitely changed me. How I teach now versus how I began are two completely different teachers. By taking in the professionalism and wisdom of my professors and applying their methods to my classes, there is no other choice but to grow. I started formulated the image of who I wanted to be in my professional position and began making decisions. I have gone from being business focused to more of an academic focus and have honed my skills.”

“Actually, I could have done my Ph.D. in my home country and in that way I could have worked full time too. But having a fulltime job and being a fulltime student is very hard to balance. Here in the United States I work, but the knowledge I gain here provides more opportunity for professional development and personal growth that I can take back to my country. Even though I chose to leave my family and my life, I am learning a great deal. Here, although I am lonely, I can focus on my work. In terms of the time management, it is more effective to study here. I used to be a high school teacher and here I teach also, but I am learning new skills that I can bring back to my country.

Compared to other professional teachers, living in an English speaking country and gaining experience as a teacher and as a student, that will be very helpful for my future career. When I return, I will be able to teach my students in real English using the same kinds of expressions the way it is said here. This experience is really good not only to improve as a teacher, but also as a future educator. When I arrived here at first, I was so excited. Linguistically, though, it has been a bit challenging and it is still challenging. At that time, I had no idea of what was going on here linguistically and culturally. Now, as time goes on, I am getting used to living here and I am getting used to how to deal with cultural problems. I can get around and read the assignments for class. I am learning how to express my feelings and make new friends. At first, making international friends or American friends was a challenge. I also wanted to have a good relationship with my faculty. There is no right answer except for being honest and being sincere to others. That is what made sense to me. I found that is what worked. I did not worry about how to act with faculty members or with my new international or American student friends. I just needed to do my work. There is no difference between my country and here. Graduate school life has advanced my life. I learned the culture and the language. I did not speak English well before I came here and now I can speak it much better. I can also build my reputation as a columnist by gaining a doctoral degree, which is a big advantage in my country. So, coming to graduate school has been a good experience. There is a big difference between educational philosophy in China and graduate school here. The major goal in U.S. graduate schools is to teach a graduate student how to learn independently. We need to do all the readings by ourselves and we also need to design independent

projects. The professor's role is not to teach you how to do your homework step by step. They just give you a guideline and let you do it by yourself. In China, they teach you every word. They want you to play the game by their rules. They will not give you much flexibility on how to do your work. It is very different in China. Here, being sincere all the time and being honest really works. Growth and transformation seem to occur almost daily in the graduate experience because you do not know how much you are capable of accomplishing and how much further you have to grow until you are pushed. In graduate school, you are pushed quite a bit. Growth and transformation are inevitable. The longing for growth and transformation is the main reason I was motivated to apply for this graduate program.”

“This has been an evolutionary process beginning as a student and becoming a teaching assistant. This requires growth because I shape students' lives. I am a role model who impacts students every day. In graduate school, you take responsibility for more than just one small group of people, so the next step in personal and professional growth is to reach the level where you obtain greater wisdom and judgment. The other skills you develop include becoming a better writer, better thinker, and better communicator. You must reach different audiences. When you are a teacher, you address your students, but to impact policy makers, you must develop new skill sets and time. My former job demanded that I constantly put out fires. I did not have time to reflect upon what I was doing, read research, or discuss situations with my colleagues because they were far away or they were involved in other projects. In my case, I was the only one in the whole region out of thirty-five districts in my area of expertise. Who was I going to talk to?



When I finished writing a paper for class, a classmate pointed out that I have made the transition from a faculty member with administrative duties to an administrator with faculty duties. Because of this program I now see everything as an administrator. That has been a big transformation because I look at everything through a different lens now.”

**This graduate experience has helped me transform on multiple levels.** One way graduate students grow is through personal and *practical experience*. “It is as if there are stages to pass through in order to get to the next level of growth. The first stage is orientation - where are you and what are you actually doing here? The next stage is relationship building. You grow as you get to know your cohort and peers. They also help you understand the process. The third stage is learning the system and what is required so that you grow in the way that allows you to balance family with academic life. My husband and I have become so much closer in our ability to support each other and this experience has allowed us to grow together. The fourth transformative process is what you learn as you proceed through your courses and finish those requirements. At each stage, you must be willing to venture to the next step, even if you are afraid. As you reach the dissertation and see the end, there are so many questions as to what you will do next, but you cannot really think about that because you have to finish your dissertation, but the question does not go away. What is next? In each stage, I grow in my relationships, my perceptions, my knowledge, my writing, my analysis, my understanding of big issues, and what this all means. So, on all levels, I am growing and transforming.”

“I have evolved into the person I am now and I will never totally finish becoming the person I am to be. There is no end to this evolutionary process because the more

knowledge I gain, the more I seek to gain. You start out one way in your undergraduate and master's program and then you learn what works for you and what works with the system here. A Ph.D. is developmental. There is an inevitability to the growth and transformation process. You find out your weaknesses and what has brought you to this point in your life. I came to graduate school to learn and, now that I am writing my dissertation, I have become a completely different person. It is very much being by yourself and doing a whole lot of work. On many levels, you are broken down many times just to be built back up. Things can hit you hard, but then you build yourself back up. It makes it so you get to know yourself better in those terms. You learn what you can accomplish and what you can do. You are put in positions that are not necessarily comfortable naturally forces you to grow. I feel like I can do more than I used to be able to do in terms of how much I can cram into a day. I am learning to live on my own. I am growing in that process and becoming a stronger person. I am becoming more educated. My growth has taken a big leap. I never felt I would or could come this far in my education."

"I do not have a map or blueprint; I just go step by step. I generally know the direction I am headed. Education for education's sake is also important to me. Sometimes people will provide information, but not expound upon the details. So, if it really piques my curiosity, then I will do some research and find out more for myself. Also, doing research has made me more in tune with things I never would have encountered. I know I must produce, present, and prepare. Practice lifts us up beyond our fear in order to network, think ahead, and ask tough questions. Not all of the things I have learned are

related to my readings. Actually, the people I have met have taught me the most. The goal in completing the Ph.D. is not to obtain a job, but to grow through the process, not achieve a product. Life is about learning. During the past few years my learning has been accelerated. I have become an intellectual. While I have always been curious, I now have a language to correctly articulate scientific ideas with facts, research, and a better vocabulary. I can distinguish my personal opinion from facts and support my opinion with research. I look at theories from a variety of viewpoints. It has been nice and I appreciate that faculty help me find courses that allow me to keep growing. That keeps pushing me to continue with the graduate experience. My sense of wonder has been nurtured and allows me to go into many new directions. Maybe it was always there, but you cannot help but wonder that the vast universe of knowledge is expansive and much wider than anything immediately around you. At the university there are a huge number of databases, libraries, and resources. It is just amazing. I keep discovering that there is more. There are libraries that I did not know about. There is a system of DVD borrowing. It is just amazing. It has also nurtured my sense of wonder.”

“Personal and professional development define this process. When I applied for this program, I spoke of life being a journey, not a destination. Boy was that right! I do not think I really knew, like I know now, about the journey. This darn degree is a journey: long, emotional, stressful journey that will lead to more knowledge and eventually less stress. That is my goal at least! It would be great to also have a good paying job that I love and that allows me to impact the lives of people, while also working with young people. How does one go from a duck to an armadillo? Can I say

regression? I have come to realize that the more I know, the less I know. It is intimidating in some ways and the constant question I ask myself everyday is, ‘Am I the right person to be doing this research?’ I originally got my master’s degree to be a librarian and then immediately went from my master’s program into a Ph.D. program. I never got to experience physically growing into librarianship like I wanted before going into the research side of the discipline. That is where the question comes up if I should be doing this? My previous courses were not focused on philosophy, although I took one course in philosophy as an undergraduate. My graduate classes are philosophical. That is a big change for me. Learning philosophical theories provided lots of growth very quickly. I also learned policy. In general, I was just changing the way I thought because I came from a different type of school with a different emphasis in a different field. My previous education looked at the world quite differently. In this field, you must be more altruistic to everyone and include everyone. That was not true in my other field. I often wonder, ‘Why am I doing this?’ The joke is that the Ph.D. is ‘piled high and deep’ and I do not need a Ph.D. for my current job.”

“One of the things I always joke about is that not all divorces are tragedies. Something good came out of my divorce and that is going back to school as a single mother. I was lucky. Going through my doctoral program here really has given me experiences in working independently and collaboratively with peers and professors. Lecturing a graduate level course under my advisor’s supervision has allowed me to transform from a lecturer with no teaching experience to having teaching experience. I am cognizant about what I, as a student, do like and do not like about a professor -

assignments, lectures, and reading materials. I design my courses, my syllabi, and presentation materials independently before sending them off to my supervisor for approval. I see my own growth a micro-centimeter at a time, but I am spiraling up for sure. This is very fulfilling and motivating. I always attribute my continuous desire to create win-win situations to my corporate background. Teaching a class for my advisor releases a load for him. Besides, I gain teaching experiences that will, in turn, contribute to my growth and transformation and make up a perfect win-win situation. Everybody is happy! As an undergraduate, at a private liberal arts Catholic college, I studied abroad during my senior year in London. The program I pursued was in conflict resolution. I worked at the BBC based out of London and flew to Belfast to do interviews with members of Parliament, journalists, government officials, and other people within the community. That work required many facets of knowledge including communication, organizational theory, political science, and sociology. Ideas from all of these disciplines were required in one huge paper. I struggled like you would not believe and I utterly failed. It was good for what it was. I did what I could, but as an undergraduate the task at the time was difficult to bring all of the pieces together. About two weeks ago, I was walking out of a class and I thought, 'Today I could sit down and write that paper and it would be fantastic.' I now understand how those pieces fit together. I have grown tremendously. I now have a good idea of how to approach multifaceted topics. I write things now from the eyes of someone with fifteen more years of experience. My sense of wanting to achieve, setting high goals, and seeing connections, has always been there, but now I am at a point where I can actually do something about it. That is gratifying."

“One way I impact students was when I taught a Human Development class to undergraduates. Some of the students had been on probation or were suspended and this was their last opportunity in order to stay in school. They did not want to take this class; they had to take this class. So, I would talk to them during the first two or three classes about different things to get them to buy into the whole process. Since most of them did not want to be there anyway, they did not really understand the purpose of this class. Yet they had to attend in order to remain in school that semester. Eventually, I would get to the point where I told them about my undergraduate experience, my grades and my progression. When I was an undergrad, I had a lot of fun; I had a great time. Did I do academics? Yes, but only so that I could stay in school, not because I was really interested in my classes. I had a program director who told me, every time she saw me, ‘You are not going to make it in this program.’ The truth was that I did not. I ended up graduating in another field. In fact, I changed my major six times and graduated with a 2.04 in my undergraduate degree, but I had a great time. It was an incredible experience. So, when I did my master’s degree, I wanted to prove to myself that I could do it. I needed to demonstrate that I had the academic where-with-all to be successful. I needed to prove it to myself that I was intelligent and just as academic as the other students. My human development students continue to listen because the story is familiar to them because they are like me. Then I tell them, ‘If you saw my transcript and it did not have any identifying information on it, you would say that there was no way this idiot had that kind of undergraduate record and then went to graduate school and made these grades.’ Once I tell them my story and get their attention, they begin to buy into the whole

academic process and what we are trying to achieve in this class. So, academically, I have grown considerably. I do not think I am a smart person, I have to work hard to accomplish my goals. There are some people in the cohort who I think are truly bright, but I do not think I am one of those. I have to work harder than most in order to get concepts and ideas. There are some foundational concepts I never got because I was goofing around. As far as the process goes, I have a thirst for learning now and a yearning to learn even more.”

“Sometimes I wonder how I do it. There have really been times when the physical strain of going to class and working full time left me thinking that I would never finish. I look back and think about how I did it. How did I go to work at 7:00 in the morning, drive to school, attend classes from 4:00 to 10:00 at night, and come back to see my family? I do not think I could do it now. But then, I think, I just did it. I continue to take new classes each long term so that I keep learning new ideas and meet new folks. In reality, I think we continue to grow and transform to some degree as long as we allow ourselves. Personally, I have already stretched beyond my wildest dreams. I continue to transform myself. The whole effort to manage the system as you go through the doctoral program is an effort in persistence and perseverance: growth and transformation. You persevere because you know that, to reach your end goal, you must keep going so that you grow as a person. I am more equipped to handle things now. I by no means profess to know everything or feel that I will have perfect days from here on out, but I am stronger and more resilient. I can take criticism and not take it so personally. I wish I could do everything and, after this, I feel that I can really do anything. I know this

sounds cheesy, but I can mostly do anything that I set my mind to. The whole experience has taught me what I am capable of accomplishing when, at times, I did not believe it was possible.”

### Reward/Purpose

Reward and Purpose are intrinsic outcomes of attending graduate school. Graduate students seek to fulfill their life’s vision and through this process they learn. The subaffinities for Reward and Purpose are: pursuit of knowledge, family expectation, self-validation, and achieving a dream.

**I will not be rewarded with a lot of rank and responsibilities for coming here, but I will be rewarded with the knowledge that I did something I feel is worthwhile.** *Pursuit of knowledge* refers to the reward students find in undertaking their degree program and realizing their academic and intellectual progress. “The money, for sure, will come and the advancement to this level has to come early for me, which is good. But, I have that internal piece that outweighs everything else. Getting a Ph.D. is a whole different kind of reward. It feels like I am getting graded on my brain and what I can produce as opposed to how I look or dress or any of those things. I have the internal reward of being the first in my family to reach this level. I always say there is only a percent of a percent of Latino individuals who have a Ph.D.. That means something for me, because of my background. I graduated in the fourth quarter of my high school class, and I was deemed to not succeed. Getting a Ph.D. sometimes reminds me that I am not as prepared as I would like, but other times it reminds me that you still have it on a good



day. I like the reward of learning and being smarter and I think it will come, but right now I do not feel the reward. A friend suggested, 'Hey, why not run a marathon?' I thought, 'There is no way that I would do a marathon,' but sure enough I did one last year. It is the ongoing purpose of something bigger; being in school allows me to experience that on a daily basis. A lot of the reward is just being here. The end result is not what I am going to do once I finish my Ph.D., because I plan to do postdoctoral work or there will be something else. I will go get the J.D. degree that I have always wanted at the law school or do a dual degree program with the policy school. For me, it is about the journey, it is not the end. It is the process and not the results. At the end of every semester, I can get motivated to move on to the next semester. Achieving a goal is enormously satisfying in the sense that it gives you positive reinforcement that you can actually do something. If earning the degree takes seven years, eight years, you can still do it by just taking one day after the next, and you can accomplish your goal."

"I have always been somebody who is looking for the next step, the next thing I can push myself to do. I have an opportunity to be exposed to so much now that so many people do not. The things I read and the things that we talk about inside and outside of class are not things I would get if I were not here. A lot of the purpose cannot be quantified. It is that personal drive; it is knowing that, as far as scholastic achievement, I am going for the top. I am not going to be a medical doctor. I am not going to be a lawyer. This degree is the farthest I can go in this field. Going through the graduate school and seeking a doctorate-level degree takes a lot of sacrifice. Some of my friends and family ask me why I am doing this. What is my reward? What is my carrot at the end

of the day? I have to admit that it is personal satisfaction, ego if you want to call it that, but that is my reward in the end. You do not realize how much you have learned until something comes up. I worked in the field for ten years and I have a broad perspective on what is happening. The reward is knowledge; the understanding that happens in class and having the ability to answer some of the questions and dilemmas I formulated while I was an administrator. Graduate school allows me to find answers to questions I had. Going to graduate school has made me a better thinker. I articulate my thoughts better; I formulate better ideas than when I started. Attending classes and learning new things is a wonderful experience. I wonder what I will do when I am done, where it will take me, and the types of things that I will experience out of going through this process. I am a better thinker. I have learned so much. I had no idea I could write as much as I could write. It is rewarding to me to feel myself growing as a thinker. It is rewarding to go to class. I love being a student; I love learning; I love reading; I love exploring my passion. Learning is a reward to me. I can equate it most to reading the Bible. I knew a little about the Bible at one point, but then to start reading it and understand and know, and then go to church and hear the sermon about something you have read and you understand; it is like that. It is that 'ah-ha' thing. I enjoy studying. I am an ambitious person, so I set higher and higher goals for myself and for my life and for my family. I waited a long time to return to graduate school. For me to be in class is different than other folks who are more blasé about it. I find every day going to class interesting and fun, and that is an internal thing. There is the sense of accomplishment. The reward comes at the end for me, internally, when I get to walk across the stage all dressed up in cap and gown. The purpose for me is

not to get a job. I am internally driven, and in a lot of cases, regardless of what is going on, I set goals for myself.”

“As a single mom, I know it is a very difficult situation as I continue to study, but I really study hard because what I have learned in my university life is academic freedom; freedom from my ignorance. I learned these lessons through my academic advisor, my professors, and my student friends. Tying rewards and purpose into growth and transformation as a graduate student, it has all been intellectual as I see the rewards coming in to play. While doing research for a paper I pull articles, as I always have, but now I see names of people that I have met or had some contact. I learn from the best and the brightest in my field and I am getting information directly from some of these people, the *crème-de-la-crème*, so to speak. I hope to serve as the same type of role model to people, who think they do not have a choice. Even though women are breaking the glass ceiling in the area of education, there is still a mentality that men run the show and women work for them.”

“Often, the objective of the class may not be what I get from the class. I may get something totally different like a greater understanding of human nature, a greater understanding of myself, and if I come out of a class understanding myself better, and understanding different kinds of people better, then to me that is valuable to me. I really do not think the professor is responsible for setting the goals. The rewards for me are growth and change. I am lucky enough to get a chance to study in the United States and I strongly believe that my experience is priceless. I have been able to learn advanced knowledge from a very different culture. I meet great people who are also graduate

students. I expect that they will be very important in the future so building a relationship with my classmates has been a very good experience.”

**My parents are proud of my accomplishments and this has instilled in me a sense of pride and satisfaction.** *Family expectation* is defined by the dreams and pride parents, spouses, and children have in the achievement of a graduate education. “My parents dream is for me to earn a Ph.D. and it does not matter what subject I get it in. It is not really my goal; it is actually for my father who is very ill. I want him to see me walk down and get hooded. I want him to see me graduate; that is my personal goal. Hopefully, he will be healthy enough to come. I am very much driven by the desire my father has for me to accomplish this goal. My way of life and my thinking also has an effect on my sons. They learn from me and we share the ways of thinking together. My two small children are my purpose for going to graduate school. My wife also got accepted into a Ph.D. program just two days ago and then she is getting a full ride. My wife and I will both have doctorates. I welcome that because I told her that I will be Dr. someday one day and your son and your daughter will be Dr. someday, what about you? She has her master’s degree and now she is going for her Ph.D.. The purpose is that I want to set an example for my children. We have a choice as to whether we will take it or not.”

“My father started undergrad at the age of 43 with me. My grandfather started at 73 and did not even speak English well. He began when I graduated from high school. That was my motivation. My purpose is to set an example for my children and tell them that the opportunity is there; the question is whether you take it or not. The long-term

rewards of what I will do after this degree and the military are utilitarian. The military will make sure I can put food on the table for my family after I am retired. I will be fairly marketable, because I will have a Ph.D. under my belt. In that respect, this doctorate is my badge of courage. When I was 21 years old, many of my professors said, ‘You should go on and get a Ph.D.. I have always had that in the back of my mind. I had a professor here as an undergraduate that completely changed my life. She changed my purpose in life just by being herself. She was a young female professor – the first one I had here. All of the rest were all older white males. She made me think of myself in a way that I had not before. I want to get this degree and do better than anyone in our family has done and bring my family to a new level.”

**At the end of the semester, I feel, purpose, pride, and a sense of validation in getting through the semester.** *Self-validation* is defined in this study as the personal sense of respect and accomplishment in reaching one’s educational goals. “As a student in this program, doing well will be my reward; completing the program and doing a good job will be rewarding for me. I want to make a contribution to others. I see myself as a person who is here to serve. By having a Ph.D. I can help others at home, in my community, and at work. My main motivation for being here is to hold higher positions in education or in my practice. Realistically, in order to impact change, you must be in management. When you are anything less, like a teacher or academic advisor, you cannot make any policy or procedural changes that will have an impact. You can make suggestions, but that does not mean your supervisor will go along with those suggestions. Often, supervisors are not in the loop of day-to-day operations.”

“The reward for me comes in being in a position where I can really impact change. That could be at the dean’s level, vice-president’s level, or any management level. It is not about being a president because I do not have to be a president. I do not have to be someone who tells other people what to do. Many people in administrative positions never take five minutes to talk to a student, yet students’ needs and interests should be our primary concern. I seek to better conditions for students, because if no one had ever taken a little time with me and said, ‘This is what you need to do and this is how you should do it,’ then I probably would not be here right now. My desire to finish within three years pushes me on, along with my organizational and planning skills I acquired during my years of corporate life. Grades are important; I strive for good grades. I want to earn my degree and so that I can go home and make a difference. My purpose of life is to make a difference in domestic violence. I believe I need a Ph.D. to educate people about this insidious problem in our society. Making a difference in domestic violence is my purpose in life. Becoming a minority woman faculty member in the most culturally-diverse city in the nation is my purpose of being here. Earning a Ph.D. is a milestone for me to fulfill my purpose. Perhaps, after I receive my degree, I will be another step closer to the vision I have to help others. In my everyday life, receiving good grades for my hard work is rewarding. Being able to help my clients as a counselor to better their quality of life is also rewarding.”

“Balancing out all the pains and issues with graduate school, my biggest reward is serving as a teacher. I deal with students directly. I prefer freshmen for this reason. They still have a little joy when they learn something and my upper division students do not.

Therefore, the intrinsic reward is, after spending an hour with someone during office hours, the light finally goes on, and I feel so happy for them, because they finally ‘get it.’ What I love best about teaching is helping students in the capacity that I can, particularly freshmen, to transition into college. When they come and tell me that they did ‘this thing to study’ and they got an A on their test, and they did not think they would get an A because they did not know that it was something that they could do, that is the reward. A lot of it has to do with my interaction with the students I teach, rather than the other people at the university or people in my program. To share the value of teaching and teach other people how to teach is really doing something. I really enjoy this. That is for me what I love best about teaching. Sometimes I see some of the interactions a particular professor has with students and I want to be more like that professor. My work as a teaching assistant is funding my graduate school education. When I leave here, I plan to teach in my field because many students are deficient. It is something that I noticed as a teaching assistant when I started investigating what was happening. I am a good student. I am at the upper crust. I can handle the teaching, but most students cannot do that. Therefore, my goal is to actually make education in my discipline better for the students. That is my reason for being here. In the end, this has been a great way for me to basically get a degree for free but also do something for my country in an organization that has been really good to me and in a field in which I enjoy work. I have my sights already set on an academic career so this is the path that I had to fight for, but it is the path that I choose to go down.”

“Students who never thought they would go to college can walk into a classroom with an inspired teacher and see a world of opportunities; that is wonderful. I would like to be a professor in a university setting where the students historically would not have gone to college. For that student to enter as an undergraduate and see a young Hispanic female professor, that may just be the incentive for that young Hispanic female to believe that she should keep on going and say, ‘If she can do it, I can do it too.’ I hope to serve as a role model to underprivileged students after I finish my Ph.D.. I am interested in improving undergraduate education in my discipline. My interest is community college leadership and working in community colleges where people get their first two years of school. I am here to serve others. I quickly realized that the best way to serve is by having a Ph.D.. The Ph.D. is going to allow me to serve in the finest positions in education. I went to a community college and had an amazing experience. I believe that community colleges help the most disadvantaged students in their quest to access college. I want to help the most marginalized or the poorest students cross the threshold into higher education. I believe community colleges are the pathway to enter. They enable people who would not normally continue with their education to enter school. I want to help other students in the same way I was helped in community college. It is my way of giving back and share the value of education. It is more than a reward; it is something I really enjoy.”

“My core focus is doing all of my academic work well because when I started the school, I did not know anything. I literally just jumped in and said, ‘Okay, I’m going to do it!’ The practical experience came really quick. My goal right now is just to learn



about the organizational structure, understand those things I never really thought about before like the finances and then see how that fits into the school. Going for my doctorate gives me a sense of pride. I went to an Ivy League school for my master's degree and so coming from an Ivy League school to here, the standards are different. That has been really hard for me. The academic rigor is not on the same level. The class structure is the same, but I think the students do not care as much here. They are more like, 'let us just get by, I do not care, just get me by through the system.' So, for me, that has been really hard. It is hard because I am starting over. Many people in the program are from this state. I am not from this area. I went to a good school. I was on a scholarship and had fellowships; I was self-sufficient. I was the queen of the world. I had my school and I had graduate school. It is really hard to sit in a class and feel disconnected. Some student's understanding of the problems in education is different from my understanding. My understanding is a little more worldly, because I have been overseas. I have been to New York City. When some students talk about education, I do not think they consider it as personally as what they give lip-service to. I think that is where it gets discouraging. Then, I just feel like I am a nobody going from my Ivy League environment where I was on a fellowship to this and I have to start over. I do not know if I can retrace the relationships that I need. A friend of mine applied for an administrative position at a charter school. She is one of the finalists. I noticed yesterday when we were sitting in class, everyone talked to her differently because she was the finalist. She pretty much got the position. But, I went home, a part of me was jealous. I was kind of discouraged. I thought, 'When am I going to get my chance again?' I know I am just as good as these

guys, but I just have to sit back, be quiet in class, and get through the system. When I was back at home and not yet at the university, I felt like I was missing something. I just knew deep inside that I was successful but I always felt like there was a void. There was something more that I needed to understand. It was a quest for more knowledge, for a better understanding, not just for my community, but for society. I wanted to know more about how systems work, how politics work, and why people react instead of strategically planning. That is one of the reasons why I felt like I was missing something. I underwent intense self-analysis of what I was missing and I tried to reach that point where I felt like I was finally on the right track. I am learning and it is something that is meeting my purpose and my goal.”

“I have had some wonderful professors who have helped me define the problems minorities face. It is an amazing passion and my professors are insightful. One of my professors reached out to those who are bilingual and those who are of Hispanic descent, but were born in the United States. My job with a Hispanic organization is run by private funding and is membership based. We must get people to join as members to be able to pay for the services we offer. That is why, even though I am vice president, I do not make much money and need to have another job. The people at my work have not been prejudiced toward me as a white person. Sometimes people do meet me and ask me if I am a Latina. I wish I could say yes, but I am not. I am German. Even so, people have been very supportive.”

“Our society is based on achievement. To a large extent, success is based upon a work ethic that values hard work, discipline, and structure. People are driven by a sense

of purpose that needs to be fulfilled. That is a lofty aspiration. At the same time, my reward comes from me and the chance to be present on this whole journey and engage with others who care, even if we disagree. It is such a revelation to have this experience where you are surrounded by people who are passionate about what goes on in the world. They want to make it better in some way. Our collective purpose becomes something much stronger and more fruitful. We are doing this for a goal because this is what we love to do. I totally acknowledge all of these things off the bat, but the real reward comes in the journey and not necessarily the destination. This is my fourth semester, but fortunately I got an invitation from the Pi Kappa Pi Honor Society. I had no idea before, but I got an invitation to be member of the organization. This coming Sunday they are going to have an initiation ceremony at the student union. I was not planning to go, but I asked some of my friends here and they said it is a very prestigious honor society and I should go. My family highly encouraged me to go so I am planning to go there. It is kind of a reward for me.”

“Last winter vacation, I visited my home country and my doctors found something else in my body. It is a benign tumor, not cancer, but I also was found to have high blood pressure. Once the tumor is removed, I will be okay and I should not have high blood pressure. At the end of the semester, I am going to go back home to get the surgery done. It is okay. I am very happy to get a certificate to be a member of the honor society. My professors encourage me and give me a lot of compliments. That makes me happy, but physically and personally my relationships with my family are not going well. I have a physical issue and medical issue, so my goal now is to keep the balance. There is

a saying in my home country that says, ‘Once you get one, you lose the other one; you cannot get both of them.’ So, sometimes that is a dilemma. Do I keep this program until I get a degree? Is the degree really important? Is seeking the degree is more important in my life, my health, and my family relationship? That is really a dilemma, because I have a six year old daughter. She stayed here with me last year, but she left here and is my home country now. That makes it so, so hard. I did not expect it was going to be so hard living here alone, and just studying and focusing on my dissertation. Nowadays, sometimes I feel like I want to stop right now with what I have done and I just want to go back home to see my daughter and my family, but it is so hard living through this graduate experience. I always ask myself if the reward really worth the effort.”

**The purpose of graduate school is to gain the humungous reward of getting your masters and then a Ph.D..** *Achieving a dream* is defined in this study as the accomplishment of obtaining their longstanding educational goals. “I have wanted to go to graduate school for probably twenty years, since I finished my masters. So this is a goal I have been quietly saving for many years. Each step of the way produces small rewards, like when my article was published, when I was accepted to present at a conference, when I made an A on a paper, and when I finished a class. It is a very different kind of rewarding. Getting an A in class is different than winning a business contract or anything else. These rewards are small like baby steps, but they are getting to my ultimate goal. I started off in graduate school for the end purpose of obtaining a Ph.D. and getting the job I wanted. I did not know where this experience would lead. Professionally speaking, the Ph.D. program has helped me; it gives me an automatic

credential. I have become an authority, especially as I have gotten closer to the end of my program. I have been fortunate, career-wise, because within six years, I have been promoted four or five times already, which is not a bad thing. I hope to pursue those opportunities available with the degree that would not have existed without the degree. My purpose has to do with career advancement, and there is no other way to do it but to come to the program. Without the Ph.D. or the Ed.D., I would have been where I was ten years ago. I was not prepared to accept that. That would have been very frustrating. I plan to get a job, probably dean of students, then maybe vice president of student affairs, pay back my loans, and manage life, and accomplish my other dreams. I have to advance my career path; that is my reward.”

“I remember back when I was in fifth or sixth grade and my parents asked me what I wanted to do with my life and I said that I did not know what I want to do, but I did want to get a Ph.D.. I look back at that time and I am amazed that I even knew what a Ph.D. was. This has been the realization of a goal and dream that I have had for a number of years. I took a long time to decide to get into this program. I have always wanted to get my Ph.D.; it is an internal thing. My parents stressed education to the extreme. I come from a family of overachievers. Everyone has multiple degrees. It was not just a piece of paper for me. I wanted to have a doctorate. I always believed that the one thing that was in my control is that one day I would get my doctorate degree. I do not want to say chased after this dream, but it is definitely been one of those things sort of on my big to-do list. It is a tremendous reward for me to know that I am doing something that I have always wanted to do and I am almost to the end of it. The thing that I knew that I wanted

was something, how do I get that in my lifetime? How can I make the biggest difference? I was certain that I did not want to get my Ph.D. in education and I convinced myself that it was going to be in scientific research. I did research for awhile. I hung onto this notion that I had to get my Ph.D. in a hard science. It was not until I encountered a professor from this university give a presentation at my college that I saw the program that I wanted in science education. My underlying drive to get my Ph.D. had been there all along. I just need to get focused in the right field.”

“At my last job, I worked for one of the best supervisors I ever had. He left and moved to Michigan. The supervisor I got after he left was somebody I worked with who has a bachelor’s degree in home economics. I was the only person in my department who had a master’s degree. They did not even look at anybody else, they just handed the job to her. That was not the first time that happened. It was frustrating because I felt as if I had to have extra validation because of who I am in order to completely look at things. People wonder, ‘Does everything have to revolve around race?’ When the same thing happens to you a number of times, what else do you attribute it to? Having a Ph.D. will give me some validation. It will make people take a second look at me versus looking over me when I have the experience, the background, and the qualifications that everybody else has. They know that I am working on my Ph.D.. They know that I am a person who is motivated, who can handle stress. But they know that once I get my doctorate degree, that I could be a leader within the institution. I have proven that; I have come that far. This has been a life-long dream. I had written it off until the opportunity presented itself, and it is a brilliant opportunity. My rewards and purpose exist on a couple of different planes.

One of them is to obtain a Ph.D.. Being accepted into the program was a reward in and of itself. The other purpose was that I wanted to have a direct impact on people.”

## Emotions

Emotions are expressions of feelings graduate students experience while they are in school. The rollercoaster of highs and lows are described by students in their interviews. The subaffinities that encompass student expressions include: stress, anxiety, frustration, fear, isolation, overwhelmed, happiness, and excitement.

**The challenge is trying to balance work, family, and courses while trying to do your best at all of these.** The most frequently cited emotion is *stress* which serves to motivate some and disempower others. “The stress comes from me, not from the coursework. Like I said, I am having a good time. It is really the stress of time management, time to get it all done. Sometimes you fail or are unable to do the 100 percent you would like. That makes me anxious, especially at the end of the semester when everything is due. Invariably, my work also has job requirements due at that same time as all of my course assignments. Sometimes I become anxious when I worry that I may not be successful with all of the balls I have up in the air. I really do not have a lot of fear, except I guess that something is going to happen and I cannot finish. The academic work is not difficult. The stress I experience in academics is greater in group experiences. In one class, the group project was eighty percent of the final class grade. The group wrote a research paper together. Six people worked on it and we got a C+. I have never seen a C+ before in my life in graduate school. The next thing I knew, everybody was

fighting and blaming one another. So, to this day, because that happened over the summer, we do not talk to each other to the same extent that we did before the class. The group project caused a great riff between everybody because of that grade we received. The professor was not Asian, she was Caucasian and the student dominating the class project was African American. What happened was that we did all of the groundwork and the data gathering. Then, we got to class and the student just blew our legwork aside. When we went in for meetings with the professor, the student made it sound like he did all the work and everything was his idea. He then told the teacher that we did not find the right information. So, the student made us look stupid in front of the professor. I am still glad to have experienced that academic stress in this type of group project. I learned a lesson. Right now, in another class, another girl and I are working harder in our group because we are more focused. We want to get this stuff done. We want to do it right; the other girl is nudging people. We deliberately sign up for the bulk of the work knowing that we will get it done. We do not want our grade to be sacrificed in the process.”

“The major emotion I feel is stress. I am conflicted between family life and school life. I have too many things to do and I am an international student so listening to the classes is stressful for me. It is very scary. My case is unique. In class I cannot understand everything the professor says. Sometimes I miss an important point and I become fearful that I will be lost and not know what to do. Writing is also very difficult. It is stressful being unsure if I am writing something correctly or not or whether the professor will hand me back a paper and say that the work is substandard. Sometimes I put that out of my head and continue on as if I really belong and my work will be fine. The stress and



anxiety do not cause significant joy. There is good and bad. You have to figure out how you are going to let that affect you. Other than academic work, stress comes from my family life. Sometimes I have to sacrifice time with my baby. That is another stressful source where my energy is drained. When I was accepted, I experienced great joy and I can only imagine that I will have that same joy when I graduate. Until then, there is just a lot of stress, particularly after I had a baby. Being a full time Ph.D. student, you have to be completely committed to school. You can do this when you are alone, even if you are married. Your spouse understands. The moment you have a baby, you realize, I am a full time student and I am a full time mother. Even if you become a part time student, you are still a full-time mother. It is really, really difficult. People who talk about managing their lives and graduate school and balancing things have no idea what it is like to have a newborn baby. Fatigue is an everyday occurrence. I do not know if that is an emotion, but I certainly feel a lot of fatigue. Exhaustion tends to build as the semester goes along until, usually at some point in the semester when I have some sort of a panic related to stress. I would describe my emotions coming into this experience as stressful, anxious, and fearful, because I am in a brand new area with people I do not know. I left a pretty secure position in my home country. I had lots of friends and family in the general vicinity before and moved to a city that was completely unknown.”

“Being a mother is more important to me than probably anything. It is really hard when I feel that I am forced to put school ahead of my kids. That is probably where I struggle the most with my emotions. I have an internal conflict where I constantly remind myself that I am going to school is for the betterment of their future. However, they need

me right now. I cannot go to school and feel guilty, because I cannot learn when I feel guilty. I feel guilty that I am not there for them. I am not witnessing their life and their transformation. I used to spend time with them every single day and I do not get to spend that time. I also know it is time lost that I cannot regain. You cannot get that back with your kids. My son is two, and I will never get that time back. The other two kids are seven and ten. I miss what they are learning in school and knowing what they are up to. I miss that a lot. It means that I must prioritize. Stress typically occurs from the crunch of trying to get things done. Additionally, I have a demanding full time job. Along with my family and three children, it is a very busy time. To keep everything in balance while performing at the level in which I want to perform has created a lot of stress. I have felt stress all along the way. Graduate school is very stressful in general and just trying to manage everything is difficult. There is always too much to do, so I am always stressed. I would say that I also have anxiety. I do not just think about this semester, I think about the classes to take next semester and the next. I worry about my dissertation topic. There is a lot of anxiety because I do not know if I can possibly get it all done. I get stressed out from little things. On the week before I started, a grandfather to our grandchildren died; that was my first week here. It was a very painful time. Then, during my very first semester here, I had a faculty member who was problematic. That led to more stress to the point where I wondered if I had made the right decision to come here. Being a graduate student you are under a lot of pressure because of all the coursework and requirements. Most of the time, you are super anxious about tests, homework, or exams. Emotions are always a part of the graduate experience because you are usually sleep

deprived. When you are sleep deprived, your emotions tend to come a little closer to the surface than they would otherwise. You run the gamut of feelings from feeling like a complete failure to being extremely proud of yourself to feeling guilty for ignoring the important people in your life outside of the program. You are constantly nervous and stressed and anxious and absolutely exhausted.”

“The time when I really feel stress is during registration. That is when you start to play the game! In terms of getting to class, working with my professors, and doing the work, I do not feel a great deal of stress. I just thoroughly enjoy it. Maybe that is why it is not stressful. I do not have a lot of fear. Part of that is because I have a great home life. I do not look at this experience and say, ‘Oh my gosh, if I do not get through graduate school, my life is over. We are all going to die!’ I do not have emotions like that. I would say dealing with the bureaucracy is where most of the stress comes. It runs the gamut, but in this stage of study, I am learning that I can trust my own experience and I can decide how much negative emotion I really allow into my experience. When I first started, I let outside forces shape my emotions. I found myself tense and stressed out. My views about things are different now. I check out of situations that seem negative and I am a lot happier. I wish that I had known this in September. Right now, I literally have learned to control my emotions. There is a certain amount of stress in my classes and with my research projects, but stress is okay. I can deal with stress; stress does not really bother me. I almost enjoy stress and challenge because I hate to be bored. I migrate toward stress and challenge. The academic aspect of the coursework itself is not particularly stressful. I enjoy the learning. I tell people who ask me about the program that I have never had so

much fun working so hard. I really enjoy what I am learning. I am enjoying the people I am around.”

“The stress surrounds time management. There is just more going on than I have time to deal with so sleep takes back seat quite frequently right now. Most graduate students experience stress because they have so much going on and so much to do. And I really admire those people who go to graduate school and also work because to me it is phenomenal to work a full time job and attend graduate school at the same time. You have to schedule your life if you are going to work full time and complete graduate school too. You have to perform at such a high level. For instance, during this time in the semester, things get really crazy. In one class, I just finished a paper, have another paper on standby, got another one nearing completion. It is kind of like being an air traffic controller and you just stack ‘em and rack ‘em. That is just the way it is because it is hard. But, I do not think it is a bad stress; I think it is a good stress because I think stress motivates you to perform, to do the things you need to do.”

“On some days I am actually thrilled to be here and other days I cannot figure out why as I ever went to graduate school. One thing I can say about my emotions, regardless where they are on a given day, I do not stress out about my projects, or feel just like the world is coming in on me with everyone wanting once a piece of meal. I have not ever experienced that emotion during graduate school. So I do not regret quitting my jobs. I do not regret anything about what I am doing. Here, I think I made a good move for me professionally and personally. So that carries me through the emotion. Even if I have stress and feel angry or sad about what is happening at school, I still realize that this is

what I wanted to do and what I was supposed to do. That makes me feel okay and less stressed out and that helps me get through the emotional part of graduate school. There is also great satisfaction. I experience many different emotions. I do not want to be stuffy or a professor with tiny library glasses; I do not think I have to be that way, although some faculty play that role. There are fun people in graduate school too, even though they do sit down and write thirty pages on something esoteric and deep. Some still tell a good joke and spread good humor which is great because there is tension here. My work in diversity and multiculturalism requires writing, writing, and more writing. Doing presentations and writing papers is part of each class. Stress, anxiety, and fear are all on the same level for me. Only at the end of the semester is the stress and anxiety gone. Until then, I worry about submitting papers, meeting deadlines, and understanding the lectures. There are so many things going on. When you turn in a paper and you feel that it is not exactly what you wanted, you can feel a little bit stressed. Stress occurs when you do not have control over everything and you are at the mercy of deadlines. Also, I must manage school with family and their schedules and I do not always get enough sleep; I do not have enough time. That also causes stress. Sometimes I get stressed from just being extremely fatigued. When it becomes crunch time, I wonder if I will actually finish everything. With all of the tension, at times, I think it is great to bring humor to situation.”

“I tend to cry as opposed to get angry, so every semester I have a few breakdowns where I feel that I cannot possibly take any more work or anything from anybody. I secretly hope that everyone else has the same type of breakdowns too, on occasion, to

make me feel normal. It is very emotional. It is like you go through these lows of not feeling that you will ever be able to get anything done. Then two weeks later you are on a high. At that moment I think that graduate school is great. My projects are done; the semester is over, and I made it. It is just like a constant rollercoaster of good news and bad news both feeling depressed and excited at the same time. There is a ton of stress going to graduate school, particularly at this level. There is stress from being away from family; stress trying to juggle everything; stress from trying to get your work done. There is constant stress and anxiety. My husband lives in Michigan and my mother lives in Ohio. She had to go into the hospital last week. All of those were and still are very demanding and stressful. I have good times and bad times. Spending my birthdays and holidays alone is terrible. I worry a lot. Worry is my middle name. I put my best effort forward, but I worry about if my best is good enough. I am fully funded by a federal grant. I constantly ask myself if my grades are good enough. Like my father used to say, 'Do not lose face.' I do not want to lose face. I put a lot of pressure on myself. I try to take vitamins, eat healthy, and exercise whenever I can. It is hard when you wake up with thoughts of having a zillion things on your plate for the day. It is even harder when nobody is there to motivate you and with new stresses coming everyday unannounced. Stress can take a toll on all aspects of life. I always plan for stress control, but I fail miserably in that department. It is always at the bottom of my to-do list. When things come up, stress control, like taking a walk in the park, is kind of dropped off from the list. I really need to do something about that."

“When I first started out in graduate school, I commuted eighty miles one-way. I worked as a professional marketing coordinator at a consulting firm. I tried to juggle my job with my commute to graduate school. Just the driving itself was tough. I would get on the road and feel stressed. I think my emotions have definitely been a strong force. The stress is huge. I saw my mom over spring break in March and she told me that I was becoming grey too early. One reason is because I have a lot on my plate and my stress is very high, especially this month. We are rounding out the semester and all the assignments are starting to come to a head. All of my professors want everything turned in this month. So that, coupled with work, coupled with everything else, my stress level is very high. Well, I try to manage my time as well as I can. The best stress relief for me is to maintain an exercise program. Some days are better than others. There is a lot of stress in graduate school. I have come to the conclusion in the past couple of semesters that I am thoroughly sick of being a student in every capacity. I have two bachelor's degrees. I have been in school longer than the average college student. I finished my master's degree. I am finishing my Ph.D. hopefully next spring. Graduating next spring is probably going to be one of the happiest days of my life, because it will be the last day that I have to be in school as a student. A lot of it stems from just being tired. The stress comes from the amount of work that I have to do, but a lot of it has to do with just being sick of it. It just makes me more stressed because I know I have to do it. There is more to it than just having too much to do in a small space of time. In some capacity I do not want to do it anymore. So I am glad that it is almost over. Graduate students must manage burnout. We are on a slow road to burning out, but we want to burn slowly. You

do not want to be like gasoline and ignite and dissipate. So you must do whatever it takes to ensure that you do not burn yourself out. You need to have what it takes to finish this race. That is your job as a graduate student. That is also part of the game. You must manage your emotions and manage your burnout and your frustration. I feel that it is less about intelligence and more about navigating systems, playing the game, managing your emotional well-being and your health, because when stress kicks in, it is disastrous.”

“Initially students are apprehensive when they begin the program. One young lady who was admitted asked me a few questions about whether or not the program was difficult and which professors she should take. She was afraid of the unknown. When you hear ‘Ph.D.,’ people automatically envision an ivory tower with stacks of books up to the ceiling and you sitting in the middle studying. I told her that I have homework all the time and e-mails out the wazoo. My emotions fluctuate regularly with slight depression and high stress being the dominant themes. I never really knew just how much of this educational journey would impact my mood, my physical health, and my personality. I do not have time for anything else really. Or rather, I do not make time for anything else, because between work and classes, and wanting to do them both at a high caliber, graduate school does not bring much time to play around. I work about forty-two hours a week at my job and I am enrolled in twelve credits. I admit that I am under a lot of stress. Dealing with problems, frustrations, and hard times without much emotional support from people who know what I am going through exacerbates my stress level. However, I have not met a graduate student who does not live with stress. Stress is such a regular part of graduate school that I just automatically take deep breaths to calm my nerves. Mid-



terms and finals are the most stressful times for me. My family is often the only ones who truly know the prevalence of my emotional state changes. One minute, I am happy and feeling confident. The next one, I am stressed out as I try to finish a paper. Sometimes I second guess myself and my abilities and I ask myself, 'Why I am doing this?' My friends in graduate school are also stressed. As a third year student, I am getting burned out. I am edgier than I used to be. We are a little more impatient with each other. We are all on edge, although we still laugh and we still find ways to support each other."

"When I got my master's, I was frustrated because I was only taking three classes and they are all in the evenings. During the day, I had little to do and I was not working. Now, I work full time and I go to school on the evenings, which is also frustrating because I am always busy and stressed. On the weekends, I am really busy doing graduate school assignments and preparation for my teaching and administrative responsibilities. I get very stressed, but I also get excited when I am learning something that interests me and challenges my thinking. You know, as a full time staff member at the university, working on a Ph.D. is not easy. I also have a family and it is a lot to juggle. I go, go, go all the time. It is a lot to handle emotionally sometimes. The stress is constant. There are always so many assignments to complete and turn in. I am on a rollercoaster with the pressure of a full time job. I am happy though, happy to be getting this thing done. As a grad student, I have definitely experienced a mixture of emotions. One day, I may get excited about some great research I have found or had a great conversation; it is exhilarating. I realized that this is why I am here. This is why I wanted this degree. There are times when I do not do as well as I thought I would on a particular

project. Those are the days when I am thinking, am I good enough? But, the one thread of emotion that continues to exist is stress, knowing there will be sleepless nights and days where you just feel like you are running on air. But in the end, I always keep in the back of my mind that this is what I wanted to do. So, as far as emotion goes, they are all over the place. It just depends on the day and what is going on. I am pretty stable when it comes to emotions. I think people really cannot read me because I am an emotionally bland guy. If I were to win a million dollars, I would say, 'I won a million dollars.' So, unless I went out of my way to show emotion, nobody would be able to read me if I were having a good or bad day. My emotions are pretty stable, but sometimes I get stressed. It goes with the territory. While I do not show it, I have honestly been happy, sad, glad, mad, anxious, frustrated, angry, worried, and stressed all across the board."

**I go to the counseling center once every two weeks.** Many students reported *anxiety* as an emotion they experienced in graduate school. "I have a conversation with my counselor for about one hour about my anxiety. She has a lot of emergencies and crisis students who want to commit suicide or have drug problems. Compared to the crises of those students, she thinks my problem is not that serious. But after talking to her, she makes me think about how I should solve this problem and how to deal with school, work, and relationship problems. I keep in mind what she tells me and what she advises me, but usually I forget and just do whatever I want and that is the problem. During my first year here, I faced depression and was still struggling with life in general. I had stress, anxiety, and control issues. I thought, 'How am I going to do this? How am I going to meet people?' During the first year I had day after day of insomnia. I stayed up

for nights just crying. I called my dad in tears because I was so overwhelmed. By the time I got to my second year, I started to gain traction. I was getting to know people, doing well in classes, starting to prove myself to myself and others. I was putting pressure on myself to do well and demonstrating that I deserved to be here and get the funding I needed. Things are smoothing out. This is my third year and I have spun around 180 degrees. Everything is going great. Instead of accepting the inevitability of the next step in frustration or feeling controlled and manipulated, I have actually become much more aggressive in research projects and everything that I do in my classes. I am much more relaxed in class. I feel confident in what I am saying and I know what I am talking about. I have been teaching for the last two semesters. The first semester was okay. I was a little shaky, but nothing went wrong. This semester I am very relaxed. I am so excited now because I am here to do this and I feel privileged to have this opportunity. This is what I have always wanted to do since I was a little kid and now it is here, the feedback I get from students is tremendous. I am doing very well teaching my classes. It is less of a struggle to sleep at night; exercise is fine; my anxiety is under control. As my confidence has grown, my life management struggles have smoothed out. I do not want to look back and ask, 'What happens if I decide I do not want to do this anymore?' I wake up thinking about it every morning; this is very stressful; all of the facets create anxiety."

"Especially because I sacrificed a lot and gave up quite a bit to have this dream come true, I wonder if I made the right decision. I ask myself if I will make it through and if this something I really want to do, so the anxiety level is high. I never felt this way. I have a lot stress and anxiety, but not fear. I am willing to face it. Learning new things

and being able to accomplish something technical all by myself brings me joy, although going through an accelerated program is hard. Without emotional support from people who know what I am going through it is even harder. I have anxiety attacks sometimes. Sleeplessness is my new best friend. However, I think it would be worse if I were less busy. The whole doctoral program is emotional because of the stress involved in having so much work to do and the goal conflict in wanting to accomplish multiple objectives. Sometimes I do not feel efficacious or that I do not have the required skills. That is a stressor. There is also some fear and anxiety about getting it done. Even if your advisor tells you that you will not have a problem with comprehensive exams, there is still doubt. No one wants to be that lone person who does not make it through comps. Right now, though, I have too much to think about like loneliness, pining for my girls, wondering what I am missing in California and, of course, all of the ‘what ifs?’ I am in the process of working on my proposal. It looks good right now, but I only have one year's worth of the data. A little voice in the back of my head asks me that says, ‘What if this was an abnormal year? What if this was the right year and every other year it does not look like this?’ That is where some of the anxiety stems. I am afraid that I will turn in my proposal and everyone will ask why I did this study and tell me that it was unnecessary because no one cares.”

“I am anxious about doing well because I have very high standards and I want to meet those standards at all times. I do not always accomplish what I want with my work and personal life. If I have not seen my family and friends for awhile because I am busy, they will understand, but I still know inside that I am not being supportive of them. I

make little effort to because I have so much to do. One friend, though, talks to me pretty much every day. She listens to my research and hears me out when I need someone to talk to. She is not in graduate school. I try hard to make sure that I do not lose this friendship. I always ask about her children and try to care about her as much as she cares about me. Sometimes it is just tough and I feel guilty. Anxiety is part of the experience, although I think it is true for everyone. It is just magnified because, as a graduate student, your life drastically changes every six months. You change all of your classes and get all new teachers and a new TA job. I like it, but it is also tedious. I become anxious and my stomach begins to hurt. The truth is that I often bite off chunks bigger than I can chew. Many students keep their papers related to a single focus and have not jumped into new topics each time, but I am just so curious. Then, I commit to writing a paper on a completely new subject. I make myself investigate something entirely different and it is very hard. This term I bit off too much again and I am particularly anxious. I am not a perfectionist, but I have pretty high standards for myself. ‘Do your best’ is my motto and it kills me sometimes.”

“When I applied for my IRB after I proposed, that was high anxiety. It took two months to get it approved. Meanwhile, I had already established the focus groups I was to go run. I got the IRB approval two days before I hopped on the plane to interview people. Here I was going to another city with people I did not know. I had not done a focus group before and I still did not have the support from the university to go. Those kinds of anxieties have been very, very difficult. I sometimes feel anxious when the challenges are tied to family. I feel pain and suffering for not getting to see my children; that is tough.

The negative emotions are present every day and they build upon each other constantly. The stress never ends. It just grows and accumulates. The anxiety increases at the end of each semester when I am about to finish. Even though I know I can do it, I still have anxiety. There is some fear and I ask myself what I would do if I were hit by a truck tomorrow after all I have done for this Ph.D. and never earned my degree. There is also a certain amount of fear when starting classes. What is my professor going to be like? How much work will there be? Am I going to do everything I need to? There is certainly lots of fear involved. There is some happiness too, especially in the beginning of class when classmates joke around and tell stories. So there is a rollercoaster of emotions. It is hard to separate stress from anxiety. There have been times when at some point during the semester, I would wonder how am I going to get it done and that creates anxiety. But I am pretty structured. Once I get it mapped out in terms of time then I could overcome the time constraints. If I have anxiety, it has less to do with completing my graduate work than about managing other parts of my life. I am a full-time mom, full-time professional, and almost a full-time student, so anxiety plays itself out in my life, but I try not to let it take control of me. Other than that, it has been absolutely wonderful. I sometimes even experience exhilaration when I feel like, this is great; this is wonderful; this is the best thing ever. I go back and forth between the anxiety and exhilaration because I am handling so many things all at once.”

“Some of the anxiety comes from the fact that I do not feel like I am getting the full graduate experience. I am so busy working that I do not enjoy the entire experience. When I am not working, I am traveling; that is when I get my sleep. When my classmates

are socializing, I am not. When they go out on weekends; I read, study, work, write, and take care of my family. Each minute is accounted for between working forty hours a week, sleeping, or studying. So, the anxiety comes from not having time. Anxiety occurs when I start to feel nervous. I think it is because of sleep deprivation. I do not sleep much. My 14-month-old cries in the middle of the night. He finds his way into our bed and likes to kick me. While I sometimes get to bed, I do not get to sleep or at least sleep soundly throughout the night.”

“Anxiety is pretty high on my daily list of emotions right now. I am always anxious that I do not come across as my authentic self. There is anxiety about grades and finances. The anxiety intensifies as the semester comes to a close because I have so many deadlines to meet with all of the courses I am taking here with lots of papers and lots presentations. At my work, I am on two hiring committees and we must hire the people before the end of the semester. Additionally, I am on a building committee where I meet with architects. Then, I have a boss who is not necessarily supportive of the fact that I am gone three days a week to be up here to get this degree. I would say the anxiety level is fairly high most of the time. I have felt anxiety, fear, and pain because I have to leave my son three days a week and that is very painful. I am also scared because I want to finish and publish. So, there have been good and bad emotions. I have anxiety about having too much work to do. Also, balancing all of the coursework, playing the game of student life, and spending time with my son create a lot of anxiety. I have eczema because of that.”

“There is a high level of anxiety in the program, although I am not sure if it is more than if I were in a job because I am a career student. My most significant job

experience came from internships and I experience more stress in the Ph.D. program. I am one of those people who cannot wait until the last minute so I have to plan ahead to keep the stress level down. At this point in my experience, the stress, anxiety, and fear has lessened. But thinking ahead, my dissertation brings on a lot of anxiety and a lot of stress. I believe now that I can get through the coursework in the program without too much difficulty, but finishing the dissertation probably creates the most stress as I wonder how I will do it all. Then where do I go once I have finished? What part of the country will I go to next? If I do not think about it I guess, I do not have to be anxious, but I do. I tend to think ahead and wonder about the next step, because in this experience, I am very much in limbo. I am between seasons of life. That is where I am now. At this level, most of the examination end-products are research papers. My problem is that I keep reading because of the fear of lack of supporting literature and relevant information. When I get down with my keyboard, I always have a certain level of anxiety. Anxiety has been such a norm in my graduate life that I anticipate its arrival. My philosophy is, if you feel emotions coming on, you have to nip it in the bud. You have got to take your health seriously. As a graduate student, I cannot afford to be sick and lay down for three or four days. Who can do that? By all means, you have got to eat right and exercise and make sure you keep your health up. Otherwise, if your health is gone, what else can you do? You cannot study, you cannot read, you cannot go to class. Everything falls apart if your health is not there.”

**There is often frustration with people in the cohort.** *Frustration* is one of the emotions graduate students note about their graduate experience. “Issues that should not



be issues are issues sometimes and that is frustrating. Graduate students experience frustration with finances; frustration in needing something done today; frustration with different people in the cohort not getting their part done. Frustration also occurs because there is so much to do and there is not enough time. There are lots of different conflicting requirements. Sometimes it feels like those requirements change. Just within a particular class there are emotions. Each class has deadlines and requirements. I work full-time and have pressure coming from within work, home, and the Ph.D. program. I have two young kids. There are different pressures coming from all sides to get things done. That brings up frustration quite often and sometimes disappointment because you can only be so good at so many things at one time. There are always tradeoffs. Frustration also stems from things I want to do when I finish, but I do not know what the future holds. That is not for me to decide; that is for my Father who guides me to decide where I will be.”

“It was the blame game in our cohort project and, as the editor, they had expectations for me. I am not one to go in and do things haphazardly. I am going to do it right; I am going to do it carefully. I called somebody and said, ‘Could you send me your part of the paper? Please use APA style.’ A student e-mailed me back and said, ‘What’s APA style?’ The cohort members were writing research papers with no citations. I was editing. I gave the paper to another cohort member who was going to do the final edit. Everything I cut out of her paper, about three-fourths of the paper, she put back in. Then she submitted the final paper to the professor, but did not tell anybody. So when the professor gave us back the paper, it was a C+. The partner with whom I worked with said, ‘Hey, you know, I’ll write it up.’ I looked at him and said, ‘We cannot hand the paper this

way.’ I struggled morally with this and I just rewrote his part. What I found interesting was that he claimed that he rewrote that section because that was the only part of the paper in which the professor wrote, ‘Good job!’ This caused a huge riff. I am going through that same experience this semester in another department class. Last week, a students and I went to talk to the professor about the situation. The first thing she said to us was that the problem about one member not writing their part and forcing the others to do it for them was ‘cultural’. The two of us who approached the professor were Asian. She looked at us callously, saying something like, ‘Deal with it. This is grad school. You need to be able to work with one another.’ One of my core values is being fair and honest. When you are asked to change your values or when people are not living up to that standard, and I acknowledge that it is a high standard, it angers me. It makes me frustrated, for lack of a better term. I expect the best of people. When I find people who do not tell the truth, I find it offensive and repulsive. It changes my view of how I view the world. If you are talking about working with faculty, there are so many hurdles and difficulties it is impossible to tally. In many cases, they do not want to hear, they do not care, or you cannot articulate the challenges clearly enough and therefore you have to cork it, go home, and do something else. The same is largely true with peer relationships. In some cases, with the good relationships, we can agree or disagree, but still support each other. In the other cases, I avoid conflict.”

“Obviously I am a pretty good student. I manage to get through in school. I get super frustrated when I am in stuck and I believe that I should be able to do it. Sometimes when there are other group members, they are procrastinators and I want to just get going

on my paper. There are times when I can sit at the computer and my writing flows, but there are other times when it is a struggle to get three sentences on the paper. Then I have to stop and reformulate, process, and then I might get three more sentences. It does not flow. I would not say it is anxiety. I would say it is more frustration. What I found is that when that happens I have to put down my project, because the longer I sit there and try to force myself to do it, the worse it gets. Since I know myself and how I work, I have to start right away. Coming into the program, I struggled with fear and frustration. I did not know if I could manage everything. I did not know if I was good enough. Now I feel confidence, acceptance, and joy. I smile and laugh more. The questions I asked when I started, like ‘What am I doing here?’ ‘Can I do this?’ ‘Am I good enough?’ have been answered. Now I know I am good enough. I just need to do it and do it well. On the other hand, working on charts and graphs is okay if I know what I am doing, but I am not a math person, so I can get frustrated. I am good at seeing the picture, drawing things out, and doing strategic planning, but I am not good when the data becomes entangled. I get really frustrated inside myself and tell myself that I should be able to do it. I also experience stress when I feel alone. I am preparing right now to leave tomorrow for a conference to start networking. I have never been to that conference before. While I am looking forward to the conference, I have probably six different homework assignments for my classes and I am behind. I am behind in my reading for another class too. I am just stressed because I work all the time. It is not like I watch sports or movies each weekend. I am always doing school work. Sometimes I am with my dogs and it is not

overwhelming; it is actually relaxing. I clean the house; I go to grocery store; I do household things and then I get back to my work.”

“I am able to control my emotions better now, but at the beginning, I struggled. I would get sad or upset or depressed. I always felt worried. I felt like I had the weight of the world on my shoulders, like everything was just hanging on a thread. Over time, I learned to keep my emotions in balance and do whatever it took. I manage my emotions now because I keep in mind my ultimate purpose for why I am doing this. Every time I think of my son, I start crying and I can get really frustrated and sad. I think of his smile or something nice he said to me like, ‘I love you, mom.’ I remember every little thing in order to make myself feel better. I remind myself, ‘I am doing this for him and not for anybody else. I am not doing research for faculty; I do it for my son. I am not here for anyone else but my son.’ That helps me a lot. So every time I get really, really down and really sad I just think of my son. That is my focus. He is who I have to do this for. On another track, I experience frustration with my advisor. He lays into me especially during annual reviews in front of the committee. No matter how much I accomplish, the script is always, ‘Well, what we need from you next year is more research and more work in the community. You must be a part of the Ph.D. community.’ So that is pretty frustrating, but then also, every once in awhile, something positive happens. I had a poster accepted to a national conference. It was a big deal. In my discipline, as far as conferences in information technology, getting a poster accepted to a conference is kind of a nuisance. It is not something I would ever do if I did not have to in my field, but for the School of Information, getting a poster accepted for the Association of Information Science

Technology Professionals conference is a big deal. That was a highlight of my experience.”

“My graduate experience has combined frustration with a little pain. You just have to put the shoulder to the wheel, remain calm, and keep trudging along. Eventually you will get to where you are going. One girl in my cohort panicked and talked about getting out of the program. You have to keep your emotions in control. If you lose control of your emotions, you lose control of the situation. As long as you keep yourself in check, you will make it through. Being a staff member and a doctoral student and having been a lecturer in the past means I have had different experiences. For the most part, though, I am optimistic. I am very positive about the school. Although the program is funky, I really like the research that we do. I like being here, taking the classes and learning. At the institution I previously attended, a professor who told me that because I was in an executive role at the time and going through the program, that I was getting a drive through education. This person is very well respected in the world of adult education. He was well published and tenured. In any case, at the time I was offended by her comment. Now I understand what she meant, because it is true. When you work full time in graduate school, you do not have time for the nuances of the graduate experience. You do not have a feel for the people and you do not get to make relationships or have time to reflect on what you are going through or how this will affect you in the future or how your options are being shaped. It is like going through graduate school wearing blinders. You are engaged in a set course of study. You are getting something from it scholastically, but in terms of the whole person, maybe not as much. Emotionally, this

has just been sheer joy. When I am up at 1:00 in the morning and I can have a cup of coffee and read a book sometimes I get frustrated because I think, ‘Oh, my heavens, I have this twenty-five page paper due. What am I doing?’ But then I stop and just laugh. I cannot believe I am getting to do this. I never thought I would ever be able to do this in my life. I feel like the luckiest person in the whole world.”

“Because the doctoral degree is such a challenging endeavor, it conjures forth a lot of emotions. There have been times when I have been completely frustrated. There have been times when I questioned whether or not this was the right decision. There have been times when it was just totally exhausting and I wondered if it was all worth it. Then there are other times when I have a great ‘aha’ moment and I know I learned something new or I struggled to understand something and then I got it. Those moments have been powerful to me. Back in elementary school I had those ‘aha’ moments. That is what encouraged me to stay in education. There are a variety of negative emotions that are part of the process. The positive emotions come out when you think clearly about how they outweigh the negative. The great friendships and new relationships are essential because life is about relationships. It is about building connections with people. Those will endure. When I think back on my experience, I will think about the positive emotions. This doctoral degree is about growing, learning, meeting new people, understanding who they are, what faculty expect, and just getting to know everyone in the program better. I used to have a temper problem. One day, I just woke up and realized that this killed my joy in life to be so frustrated with things. So when I say that I am frustrated, it is more of a feeling than a state of mind, if that makes any sense at all. I can step outside of myself

and see that I am frustrated by a situation. I try not to let it affect my mood, I just take it in and think, ‘I am frustrated, what can I do to get out of this frustration?’ The frustration also comes up sometimes in classes. I work full time at another university as well as attend school full time here. Generally, my frustration stems from having too much to do and too little time to do it. While I have positive experiences, sometimes the frustration sticks out. Still, I have had plenty of laughs with professors; I appreciate their style. I do not get too excited about things either, so I do not get emotional.”

“Jeez! Yeah, I feel frustrated sometimes and I also feel upset. I am always very tired, both mentally and emotionally, because the graduate experience is not only intellectual, it requires working with people who do not always do the work or put in the time. Most of the graduate students I know put in a good degree of emotion into their work. Every time we go into a classroom, we get involved in a debate. I try not to worry about grades, but I guess at the end of the day the result of the addition of good and bad emotions is usually positive. It keeps me here and keeps me going. Sometimes, though, I am frustrated regarding the commitment to the curriculum and preparing the students to be successful beyond graduate school. Some of the coursework has not been very useful. I can see why it is part of the curriculum, but the instruction was less than effective. That is just laziness, because any curriculum chosen should be taught with vigor; it should be taught with enthusiasm; it should be taught with the knowledge that they are teaching adults and that we learn differently. We are affected differently by those teaching us. So, in that aspect, I guess the emotion again comes back to frustration. But overall, that can

be compartmentalized and refocused to remember that I need to focus on learning the material and regardless of the enthusiasm or the energy of the professor.”

“There are conflicting requirements and sometimes those requirements change. Even just within a particular class, the rules can change and this can be really frustrating. Each class has deadlines and requirements. Since I work full-time, I need to make sure I know the real deadlines and all of the requirements. Popping up new ones after the fact is a significant problem. I have pressure coming from work, home, and my Ph.D. program. I have two young kids. So, there are a lot of different time constraints to get things done. With kids, you have to expect the unexpected, so I have to be ahead and cannot find out that a new requirement has been added. That brings up frustration quite often and sometimes disappointment because you can only be so good at so many things at one time. There are always tradeoffs. My emotions run the gamut from joy and pride to emanating a primal scream and wanting to choke somebody. There are some people I can count on if I need help. I am extremely close to these people through clubs, activities, or classes. It may seem simple, but when they offer to take me to the airport, it is so gratifying. There are also frustrations, like, ‘Oh my God, it is a Communist plot! These people are trying to stop me from doing cool research and getting my degree!’ The professors are sometimes so frustrating. They put obstacles in my path. Sometimes I think it is just me, but then I share the experience with other students, hoping they will not blab what I said to the faculty and I find out they are going through the same thing.”

“I picked a doctorate in policy because I have a sense of wanting to make things right from the social justice aspect. Picking a degree in policy will allow me to learn a



skill and take action rather than whine and complain, although whining and complaining is sometimes helpful too. Sometimes you just want to through yourself down on the floor like a two year old and have a temper tantrum, then get up and move on. Graduate school gives you a sense of reward, of understanding things a little bit more. I have to say there is a lot of frustration. Sometimes I am simply overworked. Some professors do not realize how much work they have assigned because they do not have to do the reading. They just keep throwing on more articles and books. Sometimes I do not think they expect us to read them, but I am the kind of person who does read what I am assigned and so I am like, ‘Aw, come on!’ Overall, the experience has really been positive, although frustrating. I enjoy going to school and being immersed in the whole college life. I just like being in the college arena. The reason that I am in graduate school is to learn and because I find school to be fun. At this point, I am very frustrated and kind of disgusted with the system because the people just are not flexible and will not work with me. I have run right into roadblock as I get down to the last twelve credits. I cannot seem to fit those courses in my schedule.”

“Frustration is part of daily life working in a cohort of very different students. That is really, really hard because I have had to learn how to deal with people and try to respect those I do not like. Our program is about getting the job done. It is about getting through. One person described it as being on a life-raft. That makes sense for our cohort because our job is really to work together and hold ourselves together enough to finish. I just want to tell my cohort members, ‘Please do not rock the boat. We have to be here together for a year.’ After that, we essentially do the rest of our doctoral program on our

own. Sometimes when one member does not do what needs to be done when we need it done, the rest of the group will gang up on them and say, ‘You are tipping the life-raft. Stop!’ Those emotions of trying to maintain that professional, political prowess is something I am not very good at doing, but I am getting better; it is just frustrating sometimes.”

**Sometimes I cannot do my assignment because I cannot understand my professor’s instructions.** Another emotion uncovered in the student interviews is *fear*. “I have great fear that I may miss some important component and that may stop my progress and success. I do not know English very well and, while I listen intently, I do not always understand. Sometimes fear is good because fear makes me work harder. It makes me try to do better. I guess there is nothing wrong with that. Class discussions are also difficult because, first, I have less knowledge about the topics and English is my second language. I become depressed when I cannot understand the English and, trying to speak, I am always a little embarrassed. I am getting more used to it. Wow, emotions? Fear, uncertainty, insecurity! Am I really good enough to do this? I am really proud of the fact that I have gotten to this point. I know I will finish, but I am scared and really terrified of what lies ahead of me, because I know it is up to me at this point. As far as fear goes, I found out about the ultimate fear when I learned about ‘comps’! We have to take an eight hour, closed book written test! That is my main fear. At the end of a semester, I also fear that there is only one month left and I have not gotten as much done as I wanted. I always know that will happen at the one month crunch period.”

“Most of the time during the term, I just feel stress and a lot of fear. I am afraid of not meeting expectations in writing, presenting, and participating in lectures. In tonight’s class we have to meet assignment deadlines. I also wonder if I meet the expectations of my group. Sometimes I am afraid that I will not be able to meet my own expectations. I have constant worry about certain projects and my grades. Most of the time, I worry about grades, especially grades for the out of department courses. Often, since you are not familiar with those professors, you do not know much about the faculty styles, preferences, and what they expect from you. I guess I often worry that I am not able to meet their expectations. And then, sometimes, I get a little scared because I worry if I am I supposed to be here or if I belong here. I sometimes have a fear of whether or not I will make it to the finish line or that I am not doing what I should be doing; then I feel a lot of guilt. Anytime I am not studying, I feel guilty. Most of my fear drives me to do more and be consistently productive, but I do get stressed. I do feel guilty. I have anxiety and fear sometimes, but that is about it. So far, I have survived the challenges each faculty member has laid before me.”

“Part of managing my life is working out and taking care of my dog. I do not enjoy myself because I work really, really hard. Hopefully, it will pay off one day when I am done with my doctorate and I do not have to worry about anything anymore. I know realistically that I will probably finish, but I will not stop worrying, sacrificing, and working really hard. More education will lead to more responsibility and more work. I suspect that sacrifice is part of my destiny. If I sacrifice now, I will get more later and I will sacrifice again and get even more. It is a spiraling cycle. I am kind of upset about the

number of credits we are required to take in this program. It just seems like I am probably never going to finish, but I am halfway done with the courses, so I only have half of the coursework left. I am scared. The fear is not being able to manage both school and work at the same time successfully. What if I cannot finish? What if I get through the dissertation stage and I do not do anything? What if I finish with an ABD and not a Ph.D.? That is what makes me afraid. There is also the fear of having to publish, going to conferences, and doing presentations. I do not have fear of the class work because I feel I that I have a certain amount of time to get it done. In terms of doing what is necessary for career advancement, like publishing and presentations, those things are just terrifying.”

“Actually my biggest fear is the driving back and forth from there to here. I do not drive well at night. I do not drive well tired. I spend a tremendous amount of time on the road. I actually fell asleep at the wheel last week. That scared the dickens out of me. I am trying to use that fear constructively to make me manage my life better so that I do not put myself in that situation again. During my first semester here at the university, I was going through a lot of stress, anxiety, and fear. I tried to manage my stress through exercise and manage my anxiety by just taking one step at a time. I had to manage my fear. I have really never been afraid of anything. When I arrived the first time not knowing a soul, I traveled 500 miles. Doing that every week, knowing what I was coming up to, that was a little frightening, but since I got into those first weeks of classes, I have not had much fear. There is some fear that I may not succeed, but I think that everybody has that natural fear. You know, some people do not show it, do not express it, but come dissertation time if they tell me, ‘No, you are not going to graduate,’ then I definitely will

have fear of never completing the program. Sometimes I am afraid of failure and maybe I am not cracked up for this. It was different in my master's program where my biggest fear was just juggling everything."

"Anger has come up; that is not just academic. There are other aspects, personal aspects that are driving my anger. Fear is one. Anger is usually repressed fear. Strangely enough, the fear has been replaced with apathy. It has come down to a sense that I cannot allow peoples' value judgments of me and my work establish who I am. Some students are petty; they can be downright mean in a cohort program where they perceive that they have to look better in front of the professors. Fear is useless unless it keeps you from doing something stupid. That is how I have decided to take it now. I used to live a long way from campus and the drive was killing me. It took a chunk out of my day. Finally, I decided I am going to move near the campus when I was working on my master's degree. Now, with the doctoral program, my fear is definitely whether this is the right time and the right fit for me. I do not feel academic enough. I feel reasonably intelligent, but then I get into a group of other intelligent people and I do not feel quite so intelligent. So, yeah, I have a lot of fear."

"Fear enters the picture one month before the end of each semester like clockwork. I have a week-long conference all next week which will be totally tied up with meeting people, presenting, and listening to presentations. Although the conference is valuable, I am losing a week. It will be a great week, but I am really afraid because the week afterwards one of my big papers is due and then five days after that another one is due and I have not drafted either one. So there is a lot of fear there. I even broached the

subject with one professor who I know thinks very highly of me. I asked him if I could have a little more time and he acted like well, no, I need all the papers at the time they were due and that I was told when they were due at the beginning of the semester. He likes to grade them at once together, because I guess he compares them. I said, ‘Okay.’ He said, ‘Have you not written it yet?’ I said, ‘No, but I have been doing the preliminary research, and I do think it is right there.’ It just has to come out. Yes. There is definitely fear and anxiety related to my assignments.”

“I remember the first academic meeting. There were thirty of us in the cohort, I was terrified. I thought to myself, ‘Who are all these people?’ Half of the cohort had a master’s degree, so they had graduate school experience. I did not know what to expect. I knew what my M.B.A. had been like, but this was a Ph.D.. After the first few weeks, it was easier. I got to know more people. The emotions I felt in my relationships went back and forth together. Emotions are always there, always impacting interactions. I wonder when the transformation will take place. Is it when you get to the end and you write your dissertation? Is this more trouble than it is worth? I realize that emotions will impact the reward I get when I am able to say that I have a Ph.D.. Am I scared? Yeah. I am not scared of failure, but scared that something that is supposed to happen is not going to happen like money is not going to be where it needs to be. For example, what if I do not have enough money to pay rent next month and I do not have a place to live. It is not a fear of failure because I am too determined to fail. It is the other things, the intangibles that I cannot control. Those are the things that scare me more than anything else.”

“I have a fear of spiders and a fear of snakes. Seriously, though, I quit my job and did not have another job. I was not really afraid. I actually believe that my faith will deliver me to where I am supposed to be. Meanwhile, I have to do my part and pray that it works out. If anything, I have a fear of failure and of not meeting the standards I set for myself. Fear is a big emotion among many students in this program of study, but not with other parts of the graduate experience. I am sure when the dissertation comes up again, there will be fear there too, a fear of making it through the committee and dissertation process. Initially students are apprehensive when they begin the program. One young lady who was admitted asked me a few questions about whether or not the program was difficult and which professors she should take. She was afraid of the unknown. When you hear ‘Ph.D.’, people automatically envision an ivory tower with stacks of books up to the ceiling and you sitting in the middle studying. The only fear I have right now is that I will start my dissertation and find out that it is not worth doing. The idea I have right now is not actually playing out in reality. Other than that, I am not really afraid of anything. My dissertation is the only thing between now and graduation that could possibly go wrong.”

**The biggest emotion that I was not expecting when I came here is loneliness and isolation.** Several graduate students describe a sense of *isolation* while in graduate school. “They say this is a very solitary program. I listen to students in cohort programs who attend classes and see each other socially. I do not have any of that. I feel very isolated in my program in that I do not know what is going on in my department much less anywhere else. Part of that is just a function of my program. It is a very small and very diverse. There are not a lot of people who are in information science who do what I

am doing, which is technology information sciences. I am not used to being isolated. During my master's program, I had a very tight knit group of people with whom I took classes. I was friends with most of them and very close friends with three of them. Here, I have one good friend and we share academic interests as well. I just feel really isolated. I cannot really share things with my wife because she does not find it interesting. When you are not steeped in the subject matter, it is hard to relate to someone on that level. Schoolwork occupies such a huge part of my time and I cannot share that with my wife and that is frustrating and isolating."

"I am just lonely. I keep reminding myself that it is just another year and few months and then I will be done and in a new environment. I will not be filling all these squares to get my degree. It will be back to life as usual. For now, I just sort of have to bottle it up inside and not let it spill into my home life. Sometimes I am more irritable than I should be and tired, so I am not as approachable as I would like to be. It is hard to garner strength from the few relationships that I have especially distanced from my family. Yet, I feel so isolated from them and that is a very lonely feeling. I cannot figure out a way around that except for telling myself that it will be over soon. As I have written the proposal and defended the proposal. Even to this day I still ask the question, am I asking the right questions? This gets into perhaps faculty impact. There are times when I really felt I have been on my own. Even though I have a chairman, he just sends me to other faculty members. I do not get answers to my questions. I cannot complain and I cannot get impatient with them or else they will not approve my defense. So, I just have



to get impatient in my own corner, alone, with nobody to talk to about this. I work in isolation and, at times, that is very difficult.”

“As an international student, I come from a very different culture and a very different language. I am kind of unique. In some ways, I am full of very different emotions, but I cannot express them and there are few people I can talk to about what I am experiencing. People who are not from my country do not understand and I really do not speak English enough to tell people what I am feeling. In some ways it is difficult. I am an isolated in a culture where I do not belong. I have to realize this and accept it as a fact. I try to adjust the best I can and not let it cause me any stress because I want to finish. It is so hard because I am so sad and so lonely as an international student. I think if I had a family here I would not be as lonely as I am. But even though I do not have a family here, I have met a few people. If my family and relationships back home were going well, I would not have these emotional issues like feeling lonely, sad, upset, and depressed. Every emotion depends upon how I am doing. Fortunately, I have a good relationship with my faculty. One of my friends is having a hard time with a faculty member on her committee. She cannot a focus on her work. I think it depends on the individual; emotions always depend on how you are doing with the faculty, family student relationships, classes, finances and other aspects of the graduate experience.”

“Emotions range from anxiety and frustration to a sense of loneliness because you feel like you are one small piece of a huge puzzle. Sometimes you have difficulty finding your place in what you are trying to do. You experience satisfaction when you complete a paper; you experience joy as you get closer to graduation and when a presentation is

accepted at a conference. Sometimes the experience is isolating, but friendships you build create a supportive bond with your colleagues. Although my hometown is experiencing a rough time right now with budget cuts, my sole job now is to be a full time student. Having worked full time for so long, I have never felt so relaxed in my life than now. I mean, I used to always have two or three jobs at the same time. I attended school at night. It was very tough with everything on my plate. Right now, I am just doing this and I have never experienced the freedom I have at this moment; it is never been like this before.”

**This is my ninth year of college in a row; I just want to be done.** Some graduate students interviewed in this study described being *overwhelmed* with their experience. “But, I do not want to take a break. I have been barreling through my studies, year after year, but during my first year of this Ph.D. program I really struggled. Regularly, I go to the counseling services center and a counselor gives me advice on how can I deal with my problems. I do not have children. Actually, I do not know how anyone goes through a doctoral program with children. That must be even more overwhelming. I am overwhelmed and I just care for myself and little house. I get stressed and feel like every piece of me is breaking apart. My parents called up and they want to drive up here and have lunch with me tomorrow. They live a long ways away. I cannot say no because I adore them. But I am really busy and I am not sure how I will get everything done. Everyone wants a piece of me and there is no place for me to go hide. Right now, I call my dad and my dad calls me. I love him, but it takes time. My two dogs do not ask much of me. They know I love them and they just want me to feed them.”

“Oh Lord! I have positive and negative emotions. I feel so good when I pass a test or when I finish a class. It feels great to know that I am working toward my goal. When I think about the fact that I am going to school on a scholarship that makes me feel good. On the negative side, sometimes I find myself crying when I am overwhelmed and frustrated because I do not understand something and I do not have someone to help me. I just have to figure it out on my own. I get irritated when people are so competitive rather than helping each other. I cry at night when I have to stay up late after working eight to ten hours a day and going to school three days a week. So the emotions go back and forth, but I just have to keep going. As a direct result of graduate school, I feel frantic a lot of the time, just frantic. How can I possibly be in two places at once and be the perfect parent for my kid and be here at school at the same time? How will I take my mom to the doctor? I am torn.”

“There are times when I want to pull my hair out and hide from the world. There are times when I want to cry, laugh, scream, and jump for joy all at the same time. The workload can be overwhelming at times. My professors think that their class is the only class I am taking and their assignments are the most important thing in the world. Sometimes it is too much pressure and I feel like the world is closing in on me. Sometimes I feel like I need Prozac and a stiff drink to get through the semester. I do not manage my time the best and that adds to my stress. Oh, did I mention that I feel stressed all the time? I guess it is only natural to feel like you are on an emotional rollercoaster when you are trying to juggle a million things at once. Taking care of a family, working a full-time job and a part-time job, commuting, taking a full load, finishing my masters and

working on my doctorate has been as much as I can handle. I am actually stretching myself to my limit. I will not give in to my limits, although sometimes I am very close. As far as being close to that limit, I think that I have become more aware of my emotions. I am more emotional because I am stretched so far. But, it is difficult for me to present a tough exterior being stretched like a rubber band. So, the only fear that I have is what happens if I ever have to admit that I have stretched myself too far.”

“A typical day starts for me at five o’clock in the morning. I race to get some school work done before I have to be at work. Then, I get to work and I get ready for the classes that teach. I am also the department chair so I field problems in the department. My job is to deal with all of the problems that everyone else has. I have to help them solve their problems. Then, I go to my class. I teach my class. My bags are packed and they are sitting in my car. I leave my class, hop into my car, and drive up here to go to class. I will leave here tonight and go to a relative’s house to stay. When I get there, I will try to get some homework done before I crash and burn. Tomorrow morning I go back to the same routine. There have been times where I just think I am overloaded. I have a family; I have a job; I wonder how I make it all work? Feelings of desperation come and go. The stress comes from being overwhelmed. I tend to look at things as though it is the whole pie, instead of looking at it in parts. One of the successful aspects of this particular cohort is to train participants to think through everything in parts. You are trained to come out with everything completed.”

**I am probably one of those people who is never going to be happy.** One emotion expressed in varying degrees during the graduate experience is *happiness*. “I get

bored easily, so now I am thinking, ‘Okay, this program is not really difficult for me. How can I maximize myself?’ My grand scheme right now is to consider pursuing a Spanish degree on the side or something just to keep myself mentally motivated. Emotions can most certainly play a role. What I have found is even being happy can get in the way of being completely engaged with myself, content with where I am, and comfortable with those around me. That does not mean that I go out of my way not to be happy, it means that I try to maintain a sense of awareness of my emotions so that I not only serve my own needs, but I am conscious of the needs and emotions of others. Acknowledging my existence and the communications I have with others allows me to be fully present. Often, if I am feeling frustrated or if I am tired or nervous, I allow those feelings to happen, but I do not let them overtake me. What I do is breathe and take a break. I do the same if I am overly excited. I cut the pace down. I dictate my emotions or control them in order to cultivate greater awareness. That is related to another personal goal, which is to do research for my dissertation related to training for the population I serve in the graduate student program. My sense is that if we can cultivate mindfulness, we can help instructors move in a quicker, perhaps healthier way to be conscious of themselves as teachers while also being respectful and thoughtful as they engage students in the instructional process.”

“As a bureaucrat and a mom, I am not an emotional person. I have to keep my emotions to the side and try to do what is best in every situation. Graduate school has really tested the entire continuum of confidence, happiness, frustration, and stress. I entered graduate school thinking that this was a business transaction. I apply, show up in

class, do the homework, check it off, highlight everything, and finish each term. The more I manage my life the happier I am. Even if I have a hundred things to do on the weekend, as long as I know they are on a list and I can cross them off as I do them; I feel like I have accomplished something. That gives me a positive feeling. This results in less stress because, to me, reducing stress comes from crossing stuff off a list. When I have completed a task, and I get a paper back and the grade is anything above a B, I am glad; I feel compensated and I am happy. Good grades produce positive emotions for me. Emotions in this program mean stress and I am highly stressed. Emotions include anxiety, stress, fear and some happiness and excitement. Happiness happens at the end of each semester.”

“The other emotion I have is just the joy of being in the program. It is a joyful experience to be a part of the tradition in this program because you can pick up the phone and talk to anybody and say that you are from this program and they recognize it. They know what it is. They may not know who you are, but they know what the program means. Doing a job well, having positive feedback from professors creates a certain joy knowing you have done the best you could and being recognized for that. I also have a sense of exhilaration just to be in graduate school. Getting a doctoral degree has been such a long term goal of mine. Every day I wake up in the morning, even though I am going through tough times, especially this semester, I can look at the entire picture and I can see some great things happening and opportunities down the road. I feel very happy that I am part of the program. Happiness is the emotion I get most in my classes and it can almost delete all the others, but they are there.”

“Sometimes I do not tell people that I am in graduate school pursuing a Ph.D. because it can have a negative connotation. Some people may think that I think I am better than they are. So, sometimes I will not even say anything, especially because I am a Black male. That really has some different connotations. Other people tell me that I am not really Black because I am on this academic track and I talk funny, with an air of sophistication and big words, that kind of thing. So, many times I will not say anything. I just say I am in school doing some additional coursework. Some people say that I should be proud of this accomplishment and I respond that it is not that I am not proud, but I do not want to hear all that other stuff. Work is the reason that I am here; they have allowed me to come to school. Now, with the current budget situation, if I were to get cut then I am happy being a student, because I know I will get a job when I complete this program. My personal priority is getting school completed first. I will work overtime at night and on the weekends just to make sure that I get my assignments done first. School comes first. For now, my mom is excited and happy because I am doing this and that does me all the good in the world.”

“My friends outside of graduate school help me keep perspective. When I get caught up in the fray of competitive students and forget where I am headed, friends offer support because they listen. That is important. My friends inside and outside of the program bring me a lot of happiness in graduate school. Their emotional support reduces the amount of stress I have in graduate school and makes me smile. Along with anxiety comes excitement about a new venture and the learning that comes with this new opportunity. Happiness is part of the package, because I think I made the right choice. I

am very happy and I look forward to finishing. It has been a wonderful experience. I have a lot of positive feelings. Sure, like many of my fellow students, my emotions have been on a rollercoaster. My emotional state has had a big impact on everything because when I feel that I am grasping everything I want to learn I feel good. I feel happy. I feel, okay, this is normal. Everything else just rolls along. If a particular faculty member gives some harsh criticism on a paper, it is par for the course. When my emotions go wild, I feel a little disconnected. Emotionally, this degree pursuit has given me a certain level of confidence. My thinking has not changed that much, but it has validated the way that I approach problems. I am in a position now where, when I give an opinion or I am at a meeting and I have a thought, I share it with the group. I am more confident in sharing that thought simply because I am in a position where I am around people who are thinking about the same types of issues. So, when I go to work, it seems like an extension of what I am learning here and I am enjoying the experience.”

**After awhile, I began to think, you know what, I can do this.** There is a sense of pride and *excitement* many graduate students express both for their school experience as well as their overall accomplishments. “Now that I have found a comfort level I work better. When I have more things to do I work harder and I am more productive. I need to continue to develop that confidence, the feeling that I can do it. When I began, I was embarrassed. The situations were all new to me, but now I am getting used to those kinds of situations and I am very comfortable taking classes and doing my assignments. Sometimes I feel stressed. Doing too many things has made it very hard for me to



manage graduate work. That is one negative feeling I experience, and overall I enjoy my graduate school life and I am excited to be here.”

“Even something simple, like when I asked one of the professors in my department to chair my committee and he said, ‘Yes’; that was exciting. It was daunting to ask and it seemed like a bold challenging move, but I knew I had to do it. Even though it was just a baby step, it was a thrilling event and I smiled as if I won a medal in a triathlon. Maybe it was just my personal perception, but the event seemed like it was the biggest thing in the world. I was on a high for several days afterwards. In graduate school, I am the one who has to take the orders, not give the orders, because I am on the other side of the desk. I am used to being a college administrator, so this is actually a very good experience. It is very broadening, but it can be a real shocker, too, because you do not have as much control when you are a student as you do when you are a professor. I have to switch the roles.”

“The graduate experience includes joy, pain, sorrow, unhappiness, and ecstasy, so every day is a little bit different. In relating with professors, sometimes it is frustrating. On some days, it can be exciting when professors encourage or empower you. It makes your whole day better. On other days, a professor will say, ‘Well, I do not know if your work is very good’ and then you think, ‘Gosh, am I doing something wrong?’ I have this tendency to feel down or disappointed. Many times I feel a common bond with students and have a sense of joy, happiness, friendship, and solidarity. My relationships with fellow students lead to positive emotions. But I can also have negative emotions if people say, ‘You should have done this and you should have done that.’ Then, I think, ‘Did I do

something wrong?’ This leads to self-doubt, anxiety, and sadness. I can have a lot of different emotions, even on the same day and even with the same people. Emotions have a big impact on the graduate experience. I have experienced every emotion along the spectrum from metaphorically wanting to kill myself to utter elation when I finished something or was recognized for an accomplishment. The classes I have taken have gotten me fired up about what I am learning and inspired me to go out and do something with it. It is not all theoretical. One of my psychology classes was amazing. It was small and the professor generated emotion and passion for learning. We considered theories and applied them to today’s issues. Boredom is just the opposite experience when you sit in a class where the professor does not have that same passion or interest in teaching and all they want to do is their research.”

“I am ecstatic to be here. This is one of the best things that could have ever happened to me. The whole process of me becoming who I am, becoming what I am going to become, the process of knowing that one day I am going to be a dean or vice president or president is exciting. It is rewarding, it is a feeling of pride and accomplishment. There are so many emotions involved in this experience. Graduate school, in particular a Ph.D. degree, is really nothing like the bachelor or the masters, especially if you come from a different culture. It is really very tense and there is so much work you have to do, so many readings. There is pure intellectual joy in discovering new ideas. There is also anger when you have to do readings that you find really irrelevant for your future. When I listen to my family praise me for going so far it just feels so good. There are really, really positive emotions I feel through this graduate experience.”

“I am a very optimistic person so I am rarely stressed. That is actually a problem because when it comes to deadlines, I am not stressed enough to stand by the deadlines. Stress is not a big thing in my life, in general, but emotions are. I would say frustration is one of them. Excitement has good and bad sides. For example, the conferences are exciting. Playing the game creates bad emotions and obviously emotions affect the way you manage your life. The first year I was excited. I took four classes each semester. I remember the first class. I asked my advisor how many years until I could graduate. I wanted to finish the program as soon as possible. After my son was born, it all changed. I could only take one to two classes per semester, but I still really enjoy it. I can handle having a personal life and studying at the same time.”

“I just feel unbridled joy. I do not know what I will worry about when I am done. I have had a range of emotions, from being very excited about being back in school and energized to, at times quite honestly, just being beat down. Sometimes I think, ‘Oh my goodness, will I ever see the end of the tunnel?’ But you know, if it ever felt that I was too far on the side of negative emotions, then I would question why I am here. The mixed emotions are caused by anything really. It could be a class, an assignment, a professor, a work-related situation, and just pressure I put on myself to perform and be the best. Many people do not see me outside of work or class and sadly, that is very intentional. Oftentimes, I just want and honestly need to be alone to get stuff done or, if I have or make a spare minute, I just want to take a good, long shower and slowly unwind quietly. Actually silence and alone time helps me rejuvenate and get a better grip on my emotions about graduate school.”

“I do have lots of negative emotions related to graduate experience, but when I think about the positive emotions in graduate school, I can say the experience going to conferences with the faculty is the best. An assistant professor who was not my advisor started to work with me. After we collaborated together on a project, he and three other graduate students presented our work at a very big conference. I am a fourth year Ph.D. student, but during the first three years, my feeling in graduate school was not that good. It was so difficult. I felt like I failed at the playing the game part so, I did not do much work related to my research. In my fourth year, I took the step to engage a new professor in giving me the chance to do research. This has been exciting. I hope after I graduate from the university and get my Ph.D. degree, it will continue my research. Every day brings something different, it brings something new. What I found is, the more I talk to the faculty, the more they offer ideas about dissertation or even just ideas about different ways to think about or approach study. It gives me a real charge. This is what I am here for; this is so incredibly cool. I would not say most of my emotions have been negative. When they have been negative, it is because I made choices that did not make sense.”

“Sometimes I leave classes and I am excited and exhilarated. Other times, it seems like the professor gives out twice as much work. I had one professor with whom I spent months dickering about my paper topic. I ended up just writing the paper because he wanted to change everything about the topic. Each time he changed his mind. That was so very frustrating. I have experienced a full range of emotions! You name it, I have experienced it. Positive emotions come when I am recognized for my work, receiving calls and e-mails from California, and of course, when I have the time to shop. Recently,

I was in a conference in Oklahoma. My presentation impressed a well-known professional in the field and I was invited to conduct research with him. That was very exciting. In terms of other joyful experiences, my father and my family seem to be living their life vicariously through my experience in this program. Especially my father, my pursuit of a doctorate brings so much pride and joy to him. That experience just fills me with joy, enthusiasm, and motivation to continue to do well.”

“I had just finished my master’s degree only a month before coming into the program during the May intercession. In one sense, I was in the groove of writing papers and reading and all kinds of things that go along with graduate school, so I have had more positive experiences. I have received good feedback from my peers and from the mentors and the faculty. These comments, both formally in terms of grades and also verbally, helped to build my self-confidence. Sometimes the graduate experience is an emotional rollercoaster. Much of this has to do with managing life details. There are some negative relationship experiences only because my friends outside of the program want to go to the movies or they want to get a beer. There is always that pull to do something else. So, sometimes my outside relationships become a little wobbly. That brings some negativity, but I think for the most part it is pretty positive, I really do.”

“I can enjoy the rewards later. So my priority is letting my staff know that I am there all the time. I let my professors know that I can do the job. When you see people come together and work as a team to create something that is excellent, that is very positive. In the process, you produce a document, trip report, or whatever. That is very good, but the relationships formed in the process are very positive. I get a lot of energy

out of seeing people work well together, producing positive results, and developing relationships in the process. There are emotions that come from living in a fun city that has lots of activities. Next week, I am going to a music festival. Sometimes you just need time to release. Those little rewards come into play outside of classes. You need them, too. I would not be doing these things if I were not a graduate student. I had an opportunity to go to a baseball game last week. I am in this certain spot in my life where I can do this. Had I never come to graduate school, I would never have had these experiences.”

“A lot of emotions are fearful, but then there is also enjoyment. I have the privilege of doing this; graduate school has just given me such a wonderful feeling. Sometimes I have an a-ha moment regarding teaching techniques that I can connect to my classroom. I think, ‘Oh, that did not work!’ or ‘What a neat demonstration! Maybe I will try that in my classroom.’ While there are times when it is just a daily grind and you feel you will never get it done, there are good days too. Sometimes I ask, ‘Why did I give up a job with a guaranteed income, why did I give up tenure to come and do something that had no certainty? I would be making lots of money right now if I were not in graduate school.’ The hardest part is the self-doubt.”

“This is the first time in my academic life, as a college student when I have not been working full-time. Not working has been akin to being out of jail. It is like whoa! It is been quite a learning experience in so many ways, but mainly just to appreciate the opportunity to learn and take time to learn. My emotions have ranged from elation to depression, to confusion, to enlightenment. They have run the gamut and they impact

everything that I do and how I feel outside of school and inside of school. As you gain more and you transform into whomever you are going to be, whomever you are. Those emotions take on multiple faces at the same time. I was thinking about Sybil. We need to come up with a new image for Sybil for the graduate student. It is amazing how you can have sixteen personalities all in a matter of three hours in one class. There have been a lot of emotions. I think this has been one of the first times in my life where I have actually doubted what I was doing. The doubt goes away when something amazing happens like the paper I am presenting at AERA next month. All in all, the graduate experience is magical with lots of triumphs.”

### Career Advancement

Career Advancement represents the opportunity to serve and contribute to organizations and society as well as the certification of knowledge and ability. Career Advancement also provides the professional reasons for attending graduate school and can often open doors to new possibilities. The subaffinities for Career Advancement include: opening doors to career options, obtaining a credential, requirement for promotion, becoming a professor, and serving the public.

**The opportunities in graduate school may lead to career advancements.** For some students, graduate school can *open doors to career options*. “I know I will be able to move on to better things. I plan to finish my degree, go out into the job market, and get a decent job. I think that it will serve itself well as a female in the business world, and also in academia. So, whichever direction I choose to go, I feel like I have prepared

myself to advance my career in whichever direction I go. One of the main reasons why I decided to come back to the university is because I knew my opportunities would be limited. My graduate education will give me a choice of careers. Career placement, is very important to me. My goal is to find out and do what I want to do. Entering the workplace, I will be more well-received if I have a graduate education than just going for a bachelor's degree. It will definitely open up opportunities for me. One of my professors and I have a running joke that I do not know what I want to be when I grow up. Maybe my graduate education will help me figure out what I want to be when I grow up, but I did not go the University thinking that I am going to go get my Ph.D. so I can do this job or that job. I know that things will happen because of this experience.”

“People always ask me what I will do when I am done. There are so many career opportunities that are out there; I am looking forward to trying all of them. There will be several opportunities for career advancement. I think the graduate experience is going to give me that opportunity to experience various options. The faculty has the knowledge of what is available out there in terms of possible careers. You rely upon them to evaluate you as a person, evaluate you as a student, evaluate your work ethic. As they look at you, you know, as a whole person, I would expect that they are determining what might be a good fit for me as far as where I would go in my career. What I have learned is that while you rely on faculty to help you make decisions along the way as far as your career is concerned, you also have to make sure you look inside of yourself and evaluate your competencies, strengths, and weaknesses. Factoring these into my decisions, I cannot merely rely upon the faculty and the program to tell me where I should go or what career



path I should follow. I really see it as a combination of seeking out advice from faculty and then factoring what I know about myself as well as my fellow cohort members, former cohort members, or other people with whom I interact. The job market in America is not bad in advertising. Companies hire me, so the job market is good. I want to go back to my country, but my country is having a worse economic crisis than the United States. This makes the job market in my country more competitive than in the United States. We have many people, but we do not have many jobs. I am worried about the future and look to my education to open doors to job opportunities whether I stay here in the U.S. or return to my country.”

“I honestly do not see myself advancing more than where I am. I am currently the vice-president of the firm where I work. I do not want to be the president or owner, because running a business is not my goal. Career advancement might mean having more options if my firm closes or is sold off. The Ph.D. would give me the flexibility to work as a consultant with a respectable hourly rate and a line of clients who might want to hire me on a contractual basis rather than working for a firm and being an indentured servant. I could pick the jobs and clients I chose for short periods of time and take off in between. For me, career advancement is job flexibility and career options. It is not so much climbing the ladder within any one organization.”

**They will not even interview people that did not have a Ph.D. or Ed.D..** *Obtaining a credential* is one reason why people go to graduate school. “We would call it a ticket punch in other places. If you do not have a doctorate, you will not be competitive. I entered the program to earn a credential that would be helpful in possible advancement

in higher education. I did not come for my health. The whole reason why I am doing this graduate degree is to put it on my resume. As far as my career advancement, I am going after a Ph.D.. I want to leave my doors open. If you have a Ph.D., you are going to be looked at in a more positive light. Graduate school changes you and a lot of people recognize that it broadens your horizons. The difference between the Ph.D. and Ed.D. has come about by listening to people in the field and listening to my mentors telling me that the research component of the Ph.D. is a very important component. The Ed.D. is simply not looked on as not as valid as the Ph.D.. I do not think that is so much my perception but what I have learned from my professors and from people out in the field.”

“Having a Ph.D. makes you see yourself in a different light and think critically. At this level I think there is a lot of critical thinking. It just expands you in ways you would never have imagined it would. It relationships, in your learning, the amount of material you are learning and not so much the learning part but the expansion of acceptance, of acceptance of different views. There are people out there with different views and the ability to sit down and discuss things on a higher level than you were able to at a master’s level. Just intellectually, it is a lot more stimulating than the other graduate degree programs I have done. I cannot be the very best that I can be until I have my Ph.D. under my belt. An Ed.D. is not an option because most of my work experience is in the private and public sector, but opportunities are greater in the business world, not in academia. The Ph.D. is very valuable because I think that it will serve itself well for me as a female both in the business world and academia.”

“Whichever direction I choose to go, I feel that graduate school has prepared me in the best way possible. The biggest fear I have is to fail, because there are so many expectations of me. I am the first person in my family who is going to the university. So many people are waiting for me in my hometown saying, ‘Well, we send this guy. We are paying for him, so, we are waiting for him to come back.’ I feel confident of what I am doing; of what I can achieve, so it is not the kind of fear that affects me. This is the kind of fear that motivates me and keeps me aware of where I am and what I am doing. Everything that I am doing here is very important. I have been a teacher, an Army officer, and an interpreter in the court system. I see this doctorate as the pinnacle of my career path that brings all of those experiences together. I do not anticipate doing any one of those things exclusively, but I do have my finger in a few of those pies. I think my Ph.D. will help me synthesize my experiences. Specifically, I am doing my research about languages. I am drawing on my experience as an interpreter in the court system and drawing on my experience as an Army officer overseas. I am drawing upon my experience as a teacher of languages. I am more likely to teach and do consulting. Having had off-campus experiences, my research experience, and this credential, I can apply the theory and practice in the real world. I am inspired by great leaders and would like to walk in their footsteps.”

“This is no direct benefit to me and my current position in getting a Ph.D.. It does a few things. First of all, it is a ‘union card’. I do higher education analysis for the legislature. Having a Ph.D. gives me credibility in that community. It also means that if I ever decide to leave my position, I have this credential and it would be much easier for

me to make the case to join the faculty, teach a couple of classes, and be an administrator. Finally, it also will be a benefit to my bosses when they trot me out as Dr. X. This gives me credibility, but it is not going to give me a promotion. I may be doing what I am doing now for a long time. It is a 'union card' for something I can do later. I see it as an early retirement plan. In ten years, if I am tired of what I am doing and I want to take a faculty job and do research and kick back, I will have that option. The university is not far away."

**Eventually, I would like to move to a dean, vice president, or higher position at a community college eventually.** Some interviewees responded that the graduate degree was a *requirement for promotion*. "I am now a chair of a department. Career advancement to higher leadership positions is not possible without the Ph.D.. In seeking a position as a vice president or president, it is almost a requirement to have a Ph.D.. There is really no choice if I want to move on. The Ph.D. will help me obtain the job that I desire and then allow me to climb the career ladder from there. I think you are looked at differently with a doctorate. Few people hold the position of vice president, president, or are even considered for those positions without holding a Ph.D.. I am at a director's level now and I am at the farthest that I can go in terms of a job. Once I earn the Ph.D., I think obtaining a higher academic position will be a natural transition. A Ph.D. is an absolute necessity if you want to become a college or university leader."

"I thought long and hard about going back to graduate school, but for me to get a promotion and advance my career, I needed this degree. I have a master's in computer science and a graduate degree in international business. I thought long and hard about a

career move in industry. The decision to return to school was a long struggle for me. It took several years for me to resolve this in my mind. If I decided to go into academics, I needed to have a Ph.D.. Even though I would be older when I graduate, I would still have a good twenty years of working life left ahead of me. Getting this Ph.D. is very important, because if I want to work at a university or college as a dean or an administrator, I need to have that Ph.D.. That was one of the big reasons why I took this step. It was not easy going back to school late in life and come back to school after seventeen years of being out of school, but it was a conscious decision. I knew I had to do this.”

**This doctorate will allow me to go into academia and become a professor.** Graduate school is one avenue in *becoming a professor*. “Ever since coming into the program, academia has been important to me. I want to go back to my hometown and get a faculty job at the university. I have my sights set on an academic career, so this is the path that I had to fight for, and it is the path that I choose to go down. The purpose is learning how to do the research, learning the different topic areas that I am interested in, and to teach and make a decent salary doing something that I love. In addition to research and conferences, graduate school has taught me how to write a grant, obtain project funding, and building relationships in the field. This education and training in research is a change for me. I would love to be a professor one day and help students through their educational process. I have gotten a paper published and was accepted to present at a conference. When I make an A on a paper and finish a class that is rewarding. The lifestyle of a professor is interesting. I look forward to teaching again and having an

opportunity to be part of the academic community. I was and am a really good teacher. I love my students and I miss being in a class. I will do everything I can to become a professor and serve as a teacher. In thirty years, I do not want to be doing the same thing because there are a lot of teachers whose brains have turn into a machine doing the same thing over again.”

“I am a university professor. A Ph.D. is absolutely necessary if you want to do top of the line research at a university. It is interesting, though, because I used to have a career in television and film and there are no people with Ph.D.’s in television and film. That is how I ended up being a professor, because a Ph.D. was not a requirement. When I came in, I was level with everybody else, but in just the past fifteen years the movement toward an all-Ph.D. faculty has become very big in the United States. So, I came back and decided that I would get a Ph.D. in a field as close as I could to technology in the media. That is really where I am because I am in IT curriculum and instruction.”

“I could easily stay at the university and do what I am doing now with a couple of extra letters after my name. One of the people I respect in the field runs a school and does research. I imagine doing that too. I did not have to get the Ph.D. to do this because I worked the clinic before. Honestly, right now, it does not really matter. The idea of going into academia is great, although I do not envision myself in a tenured track position. My sister, who is a college professor, almost lost her job this past year, but luckily she was rehired. My brother-in-law is stuck. He is as high as he can go in his position, although he really loves his work. I would love to teach, but I do not want to worry about the tenure-

track position, especially in this economy. I am probably better off clinically anyway. At this point, I could advance my career and charge more.”

“Today, I had a huge list on my planner that I planned to get done, but I am being pulled in different directions and cannot seem to do anything. Academic life is not an 8-5 job, but then again, I may not do conventional work. With academia’s push and shove as well as the politics that go on in my department, I would be better off as an administrator in a library while also working as an adjunct professor. I am divided. I want to be the Vice President of a library system at a major university. That is what I plan to work up to. Meanwhile, once a year, I will teach a course. I can still serve on committees. I can still do guest lectures. I would still have office hours, but not be tied to that unstructured research environment. It is competitive. I would prefer a more structured Monday through Friday job. The Ph.D. in my field would be perfectly legit. Maybe instead of teaching next year, I will get a job in research development, or working in some sort of library job. Without personal space, everything starts to clutter. Space is a huge issue as a graduate student. You need to have some personal space – a neutral environment where you can develop ideas, write, and relax. You have to have both physical and mental space to develop yourself as a person and to develop your ideas. If you do not have space, everything else starts to clutter.”

“If I could have my dream job, I would be Secretary of Education for the United States. I teach developmental writing to a lot of underprepared, underrepresented students. This experience has made me realize that what goes on, on the frontline of teaching is influenced by the administration. My plan is to get into administration and

make changes. I would love to be the president of a historically black college and university (HBCU) one day to transform the ideas that people have about HBCUs. But, I would also consider myself a success if I can implement programs for minorities. The diversity of the students and their ideas brings me to the university. Being surrounded by people who want to change the world inspires me. We can change the world. Just knowing that my peers and my professors are considered in the educational field as great scholars and motivators makes me raise the bar even higher. Every time I reach the bar, I set it higher. This university has influenced my thinking; it has been a tremendous journey. Before I reach my ultimate goals, I want to understand the big picture of the problems we face. To do that, I would first like to be a university professor, researcher, writer, and thinker. When looked into getting a position in academia, I realized that professors do not get paid very well for all of the time they put into their work and I became depressed and nervous. I wondered if putting in nine to ten additional years of college education was worth a job that paid \$40,000; that just seems unacceptable. So, I was starting to get depressed. I know a fourth year student who is doing his dissertation right now and he is graduating in May. He and I had a conversation over spring break, and he told me that if I went to a tier one research institution and publish as much as you need to publish, I would be alright. You know the name of this school carries a lot of clout. We can expect more because of where we went, not necessarily because we got a better education, but it is the brand. We also have world-renown faculty here. Two faculty members retiring this year were the fathers of our disciplines. One guy in our



department was the first one to create a tool. Our faculty is decorated and their connections are very strong. I definitely plan to tap into that network.”

**This education has been a great way to get a degree for free, but also go back and do something for my country in an organization that has been good to me and in which I enjoy working.** Graduate students seek career advancement to *serve the public*. “I will never make colonel or general, but I do not have aspirations to either. I can change cultures. I want to work with students who would not necessarily go to college. I think that is really rewarding. As far as careers, I want to serve college students and be in a position where I can influence how the college is run. I have been to several colleges where there is no support of students. In fact, administrators seem like they would be glad if students were not around; they get in the way of what the college wants to do. So my career advancement would allow me to hold a position high enough to impact these students. You cannot do that on the lower level, not really. You can influence your own sphere, but you do not influence a whole institution. The more I work in the community college ranks, the bigger picture I get. For me, it is not career advancement, but a chance to really serve the public and make a difference. I feel like I am treading water helping one student at a time pulling students along. Career advancement is a way to impact policy so that there are more opportunities for students and more funding.”

“At the end of the day, we all want to feel like we are giving back. When I realized that I wanted to help change K-12 education, I started learning policy development. I worked in different positions in education, transportation, and the environment. Outside of my management positions, I had taught college level economics

and business. Whether I gain monetary compensation or teach in order to serve, in the end, my education will allow me to help others. I worked for quite awhile in international trade and international development for an international graduate business school. I then worked in a government office on early childhood development, child abuse prevention, and juvenile crime prevention. I was very struck by that work. Education seemed to be the way to prevent societal problems. While I was working at the business school, I helped set up business assistance centers in a different country. I realized it was about helping people grow. Education seemed to be the way. I realized that if I were going to be impactful, I needed to get additional education. I worked on various national initiatives and one day somebody said, ‘You really need your Ph.D. if you are going to serve on this commission.’ I thought, that is it, I have to get this done. I expect that by getting a doctorate it will help me serve the public and advance as well.”

“I had the opportunity of starting a school when I was in the northeast. That changed my whole perspective toward how I could be heard. I was part of a project to replicate successful schools. I spent a year in a successful, high performing school. On the outside, everybody thought it was a great school, but once inside the school for a year, it was a different situation. The following year, I had an opportunity to reproduce that school with a group of teachers. In the beginning, the school had no financial backing. There was a lot of politics going on and a lot of backstabbing, but we were able to still make the school work. It was very successful towards the end of the year. The superintendent doubled our budget. Those people financing us pulled their funding. I felt like my voice was closed out. In terms of career advancement, I was frustrated, because I

was the one with the ideas. A couple of us did all the work and everybody else wanted to take it. The problem was that I was young and I did not have a doctorate degree. Everyone around me was from the Ivy League and they had doctorate degrees. I now know that I need to get a doctorate, but I had no intention of getting a doctorate at the time. It was a model middle school, but few people knew about it. The ideas I came up with worked. The guy who sponsored us started reproducing more and more academies. I learned a lot about politics, which was something I did not realize was a huge factor in career advancement.”

## Group Reality: System Relationships

### System Influence Diagram (SID)

The *System Influence Diagram (SID)* is a visual representation of the influences on affinities or elements generated via IQA methodology (Northcutt & McCoy, 2004). Each affinity is related to another affinity in the system and then considered as a whole with respect to their drivers and outcomes. The influences for each affinity are presented in an interrelationship diagram (IRD), an organized table of relationships between affinities. In the process of developing the SID, affinities are arranged according to the Tentative SID Assignment chart, and then mapped using the flow-chart software, Inspiration®. The researcher places the affinities on the blank slate provided in the software roughly in order of topological zones with the Primary Drivers to the left of the screen and Primary Outcomes to the right. Secondary Drivers and Secondary Outcomes are placed in between in the general order listed on the chart. Affinity numbers or names are used to identify each and those numbers or names are placed within the chosen shape (oval, circle, or square). Using directed line segments linking the affinities, the researcher connects each element in the direction of the relationship as represented in the IRD.

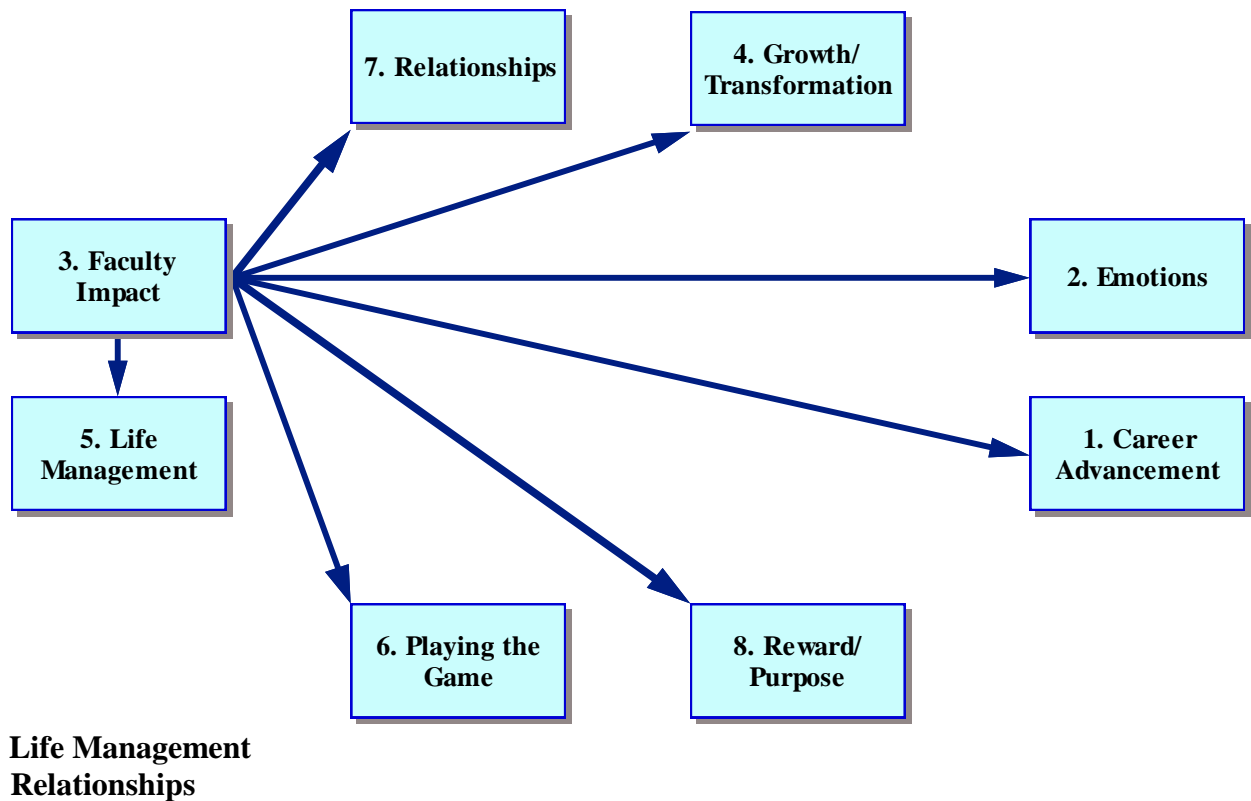
**Cluttered SIDs.** The first SID that is created contains a link for each relationship present in the IRD. This SID is referred to as a *Cluttered SID* because the system is *saturated* with links. This term borrowed organic chemistry where saturated hydrocarbons are composed of single bonded carbon atoms linked to as many hydrogen atoms as their structure will allow. Similarly, the cluttered SID contains all of the links

identified by the interviewees in the protocol leading to the IRD. The following presents the cluttered SID, link by link, along with the detail provided by the student interviewees. These quotes help describe the graduate experience.

### Composite Theoretical Descriptions

The researcher examined responses from each of the 85 interviews. Quotes representing each affinity pair relationship were reviewed and organized. Multiple quotes were woven together to produce a composite quote for each relationship. This section presents composite descriptions of the theoretical code descriptions provided by the 85 interviews.

**Figure 4.1. Systems Influenced Diagram – *Faculty Impact Influences...***



**Playing the Game**  
**Growth/Transformation**  
**Reward/Purpose**  
**Emotions**  
**Career**  
**Advancement**

**Faculty Impact Influences Life Management**

“My faculty advisor has been good. He has taken care of me financially, and given me some fellowships. Because of his position in the department, I think that has really been a determining factor in my graduate experience. If I did not have that position with that professor, I, essentially, would not be here. Managing life is easier if you have good relationships with faculty. It puts you in a better frame of mind to deal with the relationships at home, to deal with the financial stresses, to deal with the stress of all of the stresses. It is interesting because the faculty have helped me manage my money, telling me you can do that, or no, that is not a good idea, that will be too expensive. Faculty can make life easier. For example, they can provide out-of-state tuition waivers which make life nice. If you need a job they can connect you to a job within the university that meshes well with your class schedule so I would say that faculty definitely impact life management.”

“It seems weird to talk with a faculty member, but I am close to one and we talk about those types of things. She told me that it is a struggle, because she has done it. She knows I am living on student loans and helped me to better understand how to live that way. The faculty has taught me how to manage my life and pick out what is important at this time in my life versus what will be important in five years. If I have a good relationship with my faculty members, then I can say to them, ‘Hey, this is what is going on. There is a raccoon in the attic and I cannot get my paper done this weekend.’ That can change how I manage my time at home because we have

a true relationship and I can worry about the raccoon in my attic and not about my paper. Most faculty also serve as mentors. A caring mentor would not help you through your academic life only; they also care about all aspects of your life.”

“Everything the faculty does, the responsibilities they give you, affects how you deal with your life. Every time my professor throws in some wacky thing that was not on the syllabus, it really upsets my whole life. With those crazy assignments they give and the schedule they set determines what I will do with my time and how I prioritize my day. Papers or other requests or requirements drive how I manage my time and the time I have with family. When you do the course evaluation at the end of the term, they ask you if the class had a heavy workload. These are those professors who think that you need to read 200 pages every night. They do not know how to pare down the work. If a professor tells me that I must read a six hundred page book every week for six weeks, that will affect the rest of my life in ways that are not so positive for me, but I will bust my butt to get it done. For example, outlandish assignments or brain-numbing readings, for the purpose of reading an article that they wrote, can have a negative impact on how we graduate students manage our lives. If faculty members are flexible with their assignments and due dates, that makes life management much easier. Faculty have a lot of control over your life and so, those relationships ultimately decide our fate.”

“Depending upon what the faculty dictate, that determines what you have to do. They may want you to buy a one hundred and twenty dollar book and then never refer to the book except in the syllabus-not one iota. That definitely causes financial stress. If faculty make your school world difficult, that sets off-kilter your whole world, which affects being able to handle the house, money, family, and everything else. Even the faculty members with whom I work tend to think that whatever I am doing for them is the only thing that I am actually doing in the

world. They do not realize that I might have a job or a family to worry about or anything else. Faculty dump work on us and we have to adjust. If I have a bad day in class, I often bring that experience and related emotions home. You have to keep your life in order, in order to complete the process. Faculty can make it hard to balance your life. They have an enormous amount of power. When they say they need something, you have to get it done. You have to drop everything and do it.”

“Faculty have helped me schedule my time when a project must be completed. If you have a relationship with a senior faculty member, they might be able to clear some hurdles that you otherwise would have had to go through on your own. From the very beginning, faculty are upfront about the extraordinarily demanding schedule. They explain that this program is mentally demanding, it will take a great deal of time, and it will impact our personal relationships. They do not try to hide that from you. At the same time, they are empathetic and they ask how things are going. They know your spouse’s name; they know the names of your children; they really make an effort to know you so that you feel comfortable and supported. They understand that when a baby comes into your life there is some chaos and they understand that you might not be able to manage your life as the other students do. But at the same time, they still pile on the work. So, they do not pull any punches. They are understanding of the responsibilities you have to manage as a student, in your career, and in your home life, but they are still kind of brutal.”

#### **Faculty Impact Influences Relationships**

“The most important relationships I have in graduate school are with faculty. Positive or negative, one way or another, faculty can put you with other people who can help you grow and help you think. They help us build relationships with peers, help us make new friends and



connections with important people in our field, so they play a big role. Faculty influence my relationships with other faculty members, other people at the university, and even with my friends. They try to help you to build better relationships with others because relationships are extremely important in your professional life and your personal life. In my particular program, I have met people who I can now call for help. I have a concrete pattern and can say, ‘Excuse me, do you remember me?’ and they say, ‘Yeah, I remember you.’”

“The faculty set the tone for our cohort. They are friendly and approachable; they model appropriate behavior for us. Then, we model those behaviors back by being friendly and approachable with each other, and by being professional. The nature and culture of our program is built around relationships. Faculty relationships help us build bonds even before we are admitted. We are interviewed on campus, meet the professors, and talk to former and current students. You attend a class and are introduced to the program and the idea of relationship building. The faculty impact begins before you start. If they did not make relationship-building a focus of the program, then we would not be as successful. The faculty are the core of this effort and they drive home the important role that relationships have in being a successful student in our program and a successful leader in our future careers.”

“In my cohort, being in the inner circle with a certain professor helps you make more friends, and puts you in a higher position. In this way, other people want to have that connect with you. If you have good relationships with faculty, peers can sometimes be jealous. Often, people just want to be your friend because they think the friendship will get them something too. Faculty bring in a group of students, throw them together in a lab, and force them to have relationships together. I have seen professors pit students against each other in the way they group students, especially within cohorts. I had an experience where I felt that some students

were being groomed. The treatment they got from faculty members was different. I was not privy to the reason, but it created a wedge in our relationship.”

“Faculty can help steer you through the waters. Whenever there is something that needs to be done or when I talk with faculty members, I work with them and they tell me what I should be doing on research for projects for classes. Some interactions with professors have led to friendships, but my friendships with faculty have not modified my student-professor relationship. I am not married, so faculty has shown me the importance of developing successful relationships and how to pick a partner, which has been very interesting. Faculty can negatively affect your relationships if you let them get to you. Being positive, even with those who backstab you is a necessary evil to get through the program and complete the process. It would be harder to get through if you did not have a good relationship with the mentors. It would be harder to talk to faculty and approach them. This means that if you really had some questions or serious issues, they could go unanswered.”

“We just had something come through on our listservs, internal listserve, about one of our colleagues who is going to be defending her dissertation. She has had significant trouble with one of her committee members to the point where she did not think she was going to actually be able to get through. She is pretty convinced that it is going to be a very difficult transaction tomorrow. She asked for help in terms of moral support. So, we had people respond to her on the listserv. A lot of people came together to support her. Most of my relationships are outside the university. To the extent that I meet the requirements established by faculty, that determines how much time I have that I am willing to give or able to give to relationships. I do not get to talk to my parents and family because of the impact the faculty have had on my life.”

“Faculty members who have taken an interest have ultimately been the ones with whom I have developed a stronger relationship, because you cannot have a relationship with somebody who is not interested. They have to be interested enough to want to talk or say, ‘Hi.’ With some professors, you want to have a relationship after the class and some you do not. At least in the academic environment, faculty have the power and connections to establish good relationships with a graduate student. I would not be studying here if my previous and current advisors had not been friends for years. Like in the business world, a warm call is always better than a cold call. As I get to this point, faculty relationships are an important part of graduate school, my dissertation committee, and classroom relationships. I was not a total stranger when I was first admitted to this program. Hopefully, one day, I can do the same for my students.”

#### **Faculty Impact Influences Playing the Game**

“Faculty set the boundaries for you. You have to follow their rules. A lot of students do not like it, but they know it is part of the process. You have to abide by their deadlines and do what they expect from you. Many graduate students think playing the game is negative, but they do it. Students should listen to the advice they give you as you try to jump through all these hoops. Your success depends upon the mentoring, the encouragement, and faculty helping you to see that you can get from the beginning to the end.”

“Faculty determine whether the game has to be played and I actually learned how to play the game from the faculty. I have a sense that I am expected to play the game to a certain degree through my interaction with the faculty, through what they might say, and the feedback they give to me. Depending on the graduate student’s experience with faculty, and the role they play in the graduate experience, that will determine how you play the game, navigate around the hurdles, and deal with the bureaucracy. Faculty in our program spent an inordinate amount of time at the

very beginning to get our cohort through the entire program. We do really get a great orientation to what is required of us to move from day one to graduation. They were clear about the expectations, what you had to do to be successful, and how to play the game. They laid out the rules for the game.”

“My professor gives me advice in my relationships with other professors. Students often ask, “Who should chair my committee? Who can I ask to serve on my committee?” If my supervisor wants me to include a certain professor on my committee member, then I have to take the course from that professor. Based upon my supervisor’s relationships, my registration is going to be affected. That is part of playing the game. Faculty will get along with you or they will not get along with you. They can clearly explain what is entailed in each step, how to approach an event, how to prepare, and how to manage unexpected circumstances. That makes me feel confident about going through the hurdles. Faculty really have an influence on the entire experience.”

“The few hurdles or milestones I have had to pass were much easier with the help of the faculty. For example, when I have had to have my program updated, my advisor said you have done the work here and I will make sure the paperwork gets distributed and filed. Those are just the little red tape details that I do not have to worry about. The faculty teach you how to play the game. I would not know how to navigate academia if I did not have my advisors. They tell me what to submit to conferences, who to talk to, and what conferences are pivotal. I would not know who I needed to speak to if they were not telling me how to play. I am sure I would stress a little bit more.”

“The biggest part of the game is how well or poorly you navigate the difficult waters of the graduate experience. Sometimes you must navigate around faculty so that you do not to get

on their bad side or on their nerves. On the other hand, your faculty are your best teachers regarding how to play the game. For example, at AERA (American Educational Research Association) last year, my advisor took me around and introduced me saying, 'Here is my research assistant.' You stay on their hip and you watch how they interact with everyone. You realize that they are networking. It takes awhile to draw a line between the dots. That is what playing the game is about. Some of this is unspoken, but if you watch over a period of time how things are done, you can see how the game is played."

"The disgusting part is to watch other people sell out. People do some really weird things to hurry favor. There are a group of peers who will do whatever is necessary. That brings me to question their integrity when they do things that are, in fact, dishonest. It is really weird for me to watch when somebody goes out of their way to enhance themselves at the expense of one of their peers. If you consider that everyone could get an A and everyone could get a job, it just strikes me as strange and ridiculous. When you are in the TA office or in the hallways, though, it is awful. I just do not even hang out with them. They present false fronts. People are overly nice and it is obviously fake. We are not friends. You can just feel the game being played. Faculty are not the ones to decide if I get through this program. I feel them supporting and backing me. It bugs me less when I hear gossip about me, jealousy, and snide comments. It is nasty. It is really sad to say, but we do not have a very positive learning environment. It is very competitive and I do not know why. I was not expecting that from my fellow students. It is like high school."

"I really do not like playing the game, but sometimes you have to figure out what it is people appreciate in life and look at what faculty value. You can make that your focus when you get ready to tackle a project. One professor values scholarship; therefore he is really intense. That may sound odd that a faculty member would value scholarship because they all value

scholarship, but he really does. So, when you work for him, you go all out to get the work done, because that is something he values. I try to write my papers and do what they require to the expectations of the faculty whether I agree with them or not.”

“There is always that pressure to play the game. Ultimately, they choose the rules; they determine the curriculum; they approve the classes; they help you get a job. Often playing the game is required because faculty determine your progress and the work that needs to be done. The impact of faculty greatly will either undermine you or help your ability to deal with the bureaucracy at school. They can make way for you to get things that you might not necessarily get without their help. Or they can also do the opposite and block things, block your path to a certain outcome. I am working on an IRB for a pilot study. My faculty advisor wants me to have certain things on the IRB, so I am playing the game and giving them what they want and hopefully I will get my signatures. A weak relationship with a faculty member might mean that playing the game will be a lot harder for you. It is like pledging a fraternity, they all did this to get their Ph.D. and they are going to make sure you will do it as well.”

“In my case, my mentor is the man. He taught me the definition of bureaucracy, the process, and the techniques. He shared information on the model of the dissertation. In the life of a graduate student, most of the games we play involve faculty, administrators, and staff. I have been lucky in that I seldom have to play the game because I am so bad at it. Faculty have definitely shown me the importance of professional manner, how to play the game, and how ethics plays a big part of this experience. Faculty either lead you down the road so that you know where you are going or faculty can steer you off-course. Faculty can give you no guidance whatsoever so that you are floundering around trying to figure out the rules of the game. When

you do not how to play the game, you cannot do it very well. Faculty can have a huge impact on your ability being able to accomplish your goal.”

#### **Faculty Impact Influences Growth/Transformation**

“Faculty have an important role in your life as you go through graduate school not only instructionally, but also in the mentoring relationships. They serve as excellent mentors. They have definitely shown me how to handle situations. The level of support that I have gotten from faculty affects me as a professional and as a graduate student. Faculty have exposed me to different things I have not experienced before and helped me to think in a way that I have not been made to think before. The relationship that I have with faculty strongly impacts how I am evolving as a student and as a professional. Through this process I have grown, learned, and transformed. Faculty are the guardians who guide my growth.”

“Given the pressure put on by the faculty, if you can meet or exceed the expectations, you will grow. Faculty can help nudge you and impact you many times a week for free. They can nudge you even if you are off-course or your emotions have gotten the better of you. They can remind you of the reason you are here and help you stay focused. Knowing that I am under their watchful eye, I pay attention to what they expect of me. Good faculty challenge me. They help me think outside of the box. Even if all they establish are the ground rules, their expectations will drive what I am required to do. If they set high expectations, then I have to grow and expand my mind to meet those expectations.”

“If a faculty member is inspiring, then I want to learn more and do more. I also know what I am doing and how I will do it. My finance professor made the material sound so interesting that I wanted to know more. I would never have said that before I took that class. He was willing to share his experiences, provide advice, encourage me to think on my own, trust my

thoughts, trust myself, and rely upon my skills. He also challenged me to do more and grow throughout my graduate studies. Other faculty members have directly contributed to what I learned in class and how I can develop my dissertation by recommending certain methodologies or agreeing to sit on my committee.”

“They mould us through the semester; they are always there checking. I think they actually have a big impact on growth and transformation through graduate school. As we interact with faculty, we learn from them. As this process continues, what we learn from faculty helps us to grow personally and professionally. Getting feedback on areas where we need to change in or grow, we take that advice and that feedback in order to improve. This can be a real transformational experience. Faculty flip the lens and have you look at things in a different way. My advisor happens to be big on research and getting out there and publishing, obviously that is going to mean growth in my writing or in my research ability and my potential career. My writing ability has always been decent, but it is better now. Because of this, my ability to research has improved. Faculty help you learn more about your area and the research you can do within your area. The experiences I have had, especially on research teams, have taught me valuable lessons.”

“Their support has encouraged me to really dig in and put effort into research projects. I am not the most productive student in our program, but it depends upon how you define productivity. There are people who put out more, but in terms of quality, some of the research I am doing is some of the best of our doctorates. I am working on a great study. We took the time and collected the right data and then analyzed it. We presented at the conference and it was received well, but it took us a long time. We worked on it for over a year. After this particular study and my dissertation, I will be ready to be a faculty member. I know how to run good



research. It is not this half-assed, sloppy work, where you collect information on a hundred people and data is biased. I saw really bad studies at this conference. They were not badly presented, but the research was sloppy. They were too simple. We had a 2 by 3 by 3 experiment; so we had 18 cells. We collected data from over 400 participants. It was a very tight, sound study. We got great reactions and feedback. We thought it was a good study before we went to the conference, but when we presented it, we knocked it out of the park. We are going to send it to the *Journal of Broadcasting* which is not one of the main ones, but it is a good one. We had such a positive reaction; we need to send this to a higher journal.”

“Faculty will either help you or make it really hard on you. Some people will support you me the greatest growth. My positive experiences have helped me grow in a more concrete fashion. This growth is more related to career advancement. The biggest learning experience came from the obstacle. Faculty can stand in your way. They can guide you in the wrong direction, a negative direction, but they can also guide you in the right direction so you can grow as a professional. Curiously, as an administrator at the university, I observe this phenomenon in students I meet at the university, but also as a student, I have been an insider experiencing the impact on my own growth and transformation.”

“In our program, the faculty discuss our options, what we plan to do, and the opportunities that will be available to us. They make us believe we can be more and that by filling a position that exists out there in the college world and that we will have a stake in the future of education. They build our self-esteem in terms of what we are capable of and introduce us to others who have gone through the same program that we are going through who now have a leadership role. They have a direct impact on our growth and learning experience. They help us

find summer internships, work out research projects, and get papers published; they help us grow and finish.”

“I am the captain of my own ship, master of my fate. Although, I do consider myself in charge of my learning, I can choose to learn or not learn depending upon whether the faculty is good or not good. An example is with my advisor who has a seminar every spring. I have taken that seminar several times over my seven years. He has impacted my learning. He challenges me every time. I sometimes overlook details and he would say to me, ‘It is all in the details.’ I now say that same phrase to myself and he does not have to remind me.”

“The faculty are experts who help you and guide you through the whole process. The more involved faculty, the more impact they have on your growth. No doubt about it. Faculty are the head of the helm, at the top of the ladder. They really impact a student’s ability to grow and transform as an individual, as an intellect, and as a professional. If faculty support you, then you will achieve more and thrive. If they do not support you, then you have to make it on your own. The connection you have with faculty is the stepping-stone to how well you will learn and grow. I will never really be the same again.”

#### **Faculty Impact Influences Reward/Purpose**

“Without the faculty, there would be no reward. Certainly the faculty’s judgment of our work and their feedback can give us a sense of pride and a sense of self-confidence. The faculty validates you and has you envision your reward and your purpose for being in the program. The way they validated me as student and the way they validated what I am capable of when I graduate is quite clear. They had direct impact in steering me to where I was headed. If I had the opposite experience and I had faculty members who were not supportive, were intensely critical, and did not care, I think I would have had a negative experience. I would not have been able to

reach my goal and realize my purpose. The faculty have helped me understand my whole reason for participating in this program. Over the time I have been in this graduate program, they have helped me develop who I am.”

“The faculty have shown me that if I can successfully learn from them or at least understand why things are done the way they are done and learn from the experience, then I will emulate them. My purpose is to make them proud wherever I am and whatever institution I choose. People will always ask who my mentors were. I see myself as a mini-them or representative of them. If the purpose is to fulfill a long-term goal to get a degree, to a large extent, the faculty determines whether or not you get a degree. Faculty can guide you towards the right coursework. They can guide you in your dissertation. They can guide you in seeking out a new career.”

“Faculty award us grades; they show us the purpose; they show us the path. A good instructor will have you appreciate the curriculum no matter what, whether or not it is directly related to what you want to do professionally. Faculty are crucial in influencing our rewards, making it rewarding, and showing us our purpose. I am taking my qualifying exam right now. If I fail or I succeed, pass, it is dependent on the faculty. Faculty can craft the environment such that it is possible to get those rewards. Faculty can make the experience positive and rewarding, or not. The way they conduct their classes and their approachability is determined by the relationships they develop with students. If I am in a class where the lessons just do not seem to make sense or I do not feel a lot of practical application, there is not a whole lot of incentive for me to do a good job. Whereas if faculty set high expectations, but I think I am going to get some good feedback, that is rewarding in and of itself.”

“The faculty have helped me broaden my career options. My interactions with faculty, both in and out of the classroom have helped define and shape my purpose for being in the program. There are situations where having a good professor inspires you and makes it really meaningful. What I might set out as my ultimate purpose and goal, at least initially, when I get out of the program, may be significantly impacted by my interactions with faculty. You will feel a sense of purpose and you also feel good about what you are doing. Faculty can give you leads to good jobs. They have the ability to either obstruct or help you achieve your purpose.”

“Faculty play a significant part in how we advance. When I started the program I did not know exactly where I was headed or what I wanted, but through working and going through graduate school, the faculty have helped keep my eyes on the prize. Faculty in my department push you towards focusing on one area and go after the rewards, writing conference papers, and presenting research. They can help you publish. The reward is the outcome, the final thing you are trying to achieve.”

“Faculty determine how successful you will or will not be. Obviously, you have to have some responsibility with that as well. You have to determine how successful you want to be. Faculty make my journey through this program easier or harder depending upon the month, in rewarding me with jobs, grades, research, and purpose. One of my professors had a position open for a research apprentice, but I do not like to work with numbers at all. He is the numbers guru. He helped design a research apprentice project that I could do without the numbers, but also one I would enjoy that would also serve the project.”

“Faculty have provided a real purpose for me. I remember the first day. At the very end of that class, I finally felt that I was a part of something that made my story matter. Usually, I am marginalized. I come from a very, very small population. There is only I think one percent of

people like me even earn a four year degree. So I have always been by myself. But this is the first time I felt, ‘Wow, I am actually going to do something about making that at least two percent.’”

“I found out the hard way that faculty can keep you from getting those rewards and achieving your purpose by not giving you the support you need. It all comes back to how your professor interacts and treats you. If faculty members encourage you, then you can see where you are headed. They can give you direction. If faculty members are not giving you any kind of direction, then you do not see the light at the end of the tunnel and cannot realize your purpose and achieve the ultimate rewards. If someone wants to be a good singer and they are taught by good teachers, maybe they will become a good singer. If not, then maybe they will be a great singer anyway, but there is a much smaller chance without great faculty.”

“When you think about it, faculty have been through the process, they have experienced some of the rewards in the field, and they kind of know where you are in the whole process. Faculty are really key because they have the power to give you that pat on the back as you grow to become a bigger player. They can tell you that you are on the right track and you are doing what you need to be doing. If you are doing an assignment, you want it to be a good presentation; you do not want to embarrass yourself. The faculty sets the parameters, sets the matrix for success, and you just have to follow it. In the end, you get the reward. Faculty can help you accomplish your research interests and they can play a role in your future. That is the process of becoming who you are destined to be.”

### **Faculty Impact Influences Emotions**

“Our interaction with faculty and the impact that faculty have on us as students drive our emotions. Faculty definitely affect your emotional life. Whether faculty make you feel more secure because they provide adequate support or anger you to the point where you are going to leave the discipline entirely, faculty impact your emotions. Your relationship with the faculty can also influence how easy or how hard it will be in your program. A positive relationship with faculty will certainly relieve some anxiety. The opposite is also true. If we feel that we do not have a good relationship with the faculty it will create more stress for us as students. It may create fear about whether or not we will make it through this program, meet their requirements, or satisfy their expectations. Getting negative or critical feedback can make you discouraged or depressed. Emotions are often tugged and pulled because you may really want a certain professor to groom you and help you, but they think you are a pest so they do not. That really does affect your emotions. There are a lot of things that happen with faculty to influence your emotional state.”

“If your relationships with the faculty are good, you feel positive. Faculty can create an immense amount of anxiety in how they interact with you or you with them. One professor, who was intimidating in class, caused a number of students to become emotional. In another case, one of the hardest professors I ever had challenged me more than I had been in the past. At times, I was very frustrated, but I was also exhilarated when I turned my paper in to him and he said, ‘Wow this is a really good effort.’ Before that, though, I was struggling for awhile not knowing how to answer the task he laid before me. I just did not know how to do it. In that sense, if you get the right kind of faculty, they can produce happy emotions and the opposite as well. If you get someone who just rubs you the wrong way, they will give you the opposite emotion. I

dropped out of one class in particular because the professor just rubbed me in the wrong way and I knew that I was going to be unhappy in the class.”

“Faculty has tremendous power over you. They put burdens in front of you, so a lot of your emotions are tied to your work and faculty are the ones giving you work. How they give you the work and if the work they give you is meaningful will impact your ability to work hard. You have to learn coping mechanisms. When you are doing work that does not have a purpose, it is hard to invest yourself wholeheartedly. Faculty did what you did, often no long before you. They serve to provide assurance that you can get through this and, most of the time, they are going to be there to help you. They are the ones who validate the work you do and give you a ‘high five’. They stop to say, ‘This is really good. I like the way you approached this. I like the way you write.’”

“Interactions with faculty, for me, tend to relieve my stress and anxiety. They communicate a real interest in my success. Sometimes I get stressed or I am fearful that I cannot produce to the level that I want. If I have the sense to go to them and ask them for their advice it does ease the stress, fear, and anxiety. In my particular situation, the impact the faculty has on me has really affected how I felt about the program and my optimism about maybe a future career, becoming an advertising professor. My path has encountered tremendous faculty who have shown a great deal of emotional and intellectual support. I have found that my own emotional well-being has been enhanced just because of caring faculty.”

“I have seen cases when faculty relate differently to different people. I have seen where faculty elicit great fear in students leading them to believe that either that they will not survive the program or they will not get a good job or a good recommendation. When I am not on good terms with my faculty members, then I feel stressed and embarrassed. In a rare instance, when I

am in a bad mood, faculty may judge me accordingly. Usually, the professors who are in a good mood, and do an excellent job in their presentations. That gives me positive feelings. But, if I feel that they are not engaged or are half-assing the material or they do not care, it ticks me off and puts me in a foul mood. Faculty piss me off when they do not help and do not reply to e-mails.”

“The more positive relationships you have with faculty and the more they are willing to work with you and guide you the better you are going to feel about graduate school. If they are not willing to work with you, they are not willing to guide you. It can be pretty negative. When I was doing my masters in computer science, I had a discrete math professor who was absolutely horrible. One day, I went to meet him. I sought him out and said, ‘I have a problem that I need to discuss with you. It is on the upcoming final. The final is in two weeks and I need to understand a particular concept.’ He said, ‘Well, I have no time, come back to me in three weeks.’ It was just appalling to me that he would even think that.”

“When relationships with the faculty go well, I feel better. When faculty recognize my work, I feel great. My faculty are encouraging. They give me confidence and make me feel more comfortable with what I am doing. Each day, you are being shaped and the way you see things and the way you behave and the way you see life is affected by faculty. Emotions are affected by your environment. I do not think emotions themselves affect your surrounding or your situation. The situations influence your emotions. For example, if you have good faculty you feel good. If you have a very nasty faculty member in your school, you feel pretty bad. They can frustrate you. The next thing you know, you are ready to quit and walk away from your dreams. Or, they can support you and make your journey less stressful and more enriched.”



“If you are not on the same wavelength as your advisor, you could generate emotions. In other words, if you have high or low expression of emotions and that type of expression does not sync, then it can come back at you. That is abstract, but the way in which you express yourself has an impact on how faculty treat you. The way faculty treat you will certainly affect your emotions. You can be excited because you are in a great class or you can be frustrated because of a lack of communication with a faculty member.”

“When I first started in this coursework, one faculty member offered to correct my papers and make them better and better. At that point, after she helped three times I said, ‘Even if it affects my grade, I need to learn to do this on my own.’ That faculty member did not like what I said and told me, ‘You are not motivated enough.’ At the time I was not a very strong graduate student and her statement made me very emotional. Also, I felt disrespected realizing that I was not in control of this relationship. They were in control of me.”

“Faculty get your emotions all stirred up. Without getting into every war story, one or two faculty members have made anti-military comments. These are people who have never been in military situations, never read a book about the military and, are frankly, are talking through their ‘damn asses’ about something they do not know about. That makes me angry. How students are treated in class, the lack of time they are given, and the sincerity in the interactions are all impacted by faculty.”

“There is also a sense of frustration that can come when the faculty do not really teach. If faculty do not help you, then you can be very sad, frustrated, and stressed out. Professors who are disorganized make me feel frustrated, but good professors inspire me and make me want to work harder and feel good. My relationship with the professor for whom I am TAing makes me angry and frustrated. If faculty overload you with work and so forth, that definitely affects my

emotions. Your ability to maintain your composure and deal with your emotions impacts your relationships with faculty, students, and family. There is a weird tie between faculty and relationships, because on the flip side, faculty can cause you to be very emotional.”

“I have never had a faculty member who gave me ‘warm fuzzies’, so faculty are not a big driver of my emotions. I am who I am, so emotions influence me less than some people. By being positive, I am able to be more upbeat. Even if I thought something was unpleasant, I would say, ‘Oh, that was different for you was it not?’ or ‘I guess it was different. It was not bad, it was just different.’ If faculty load up on the coursework, my level of frustration may increase, but it also may determine the level of satisfaction and achievement I feel based upon learning in those particular courses.”

#### **Faculty Impact Influences Career Advancement**

“Everything, from whether you survive the program and actually get a Ph.D. to the contacts you make is colored by experiences with faculty. Faculty provide advice, references, opportunities for networking, and influence in the field. On the doctoral level, it is a relatively small world in reality and faculty contacts are everything. It is an interconnected network. In my program, if the person in charge makes a phone call, you are pretty much assured of an interview somewhere, so faculty are very influential in determining success in your career. Our mentors could say, ‘You know, you need to go to Podunk, Mississippi or you would be good to go to Alaska.’ That is because they know us and they know those programs. They work to make sure that our next step is a good fit. The faculty introduce us to leaders in the field and even to search consultants so that we become familiar to them and with the process. The faculty constantly reinforce this destiny and they help us to find initial placements once we have graduated.”

“If you leave the program without the blessing of your mentors, your career advancement just went down the tubes. Your future depends upon the relationships you build with faculty and their connections. If you have a positive relationship with the faculty, you will be able to go back for references and also for guidance and suggestions. As I advance through my career, I plan to go back to my faculty advisor and discuss my plans. The nurturing and mentoring of faculty propels me to complete the doctoral degree and advance my career.”

“I have positioned myself to work with a particular faculty member because I know she is world-renowned in her field. While I do not mean to use her for that, I think my curriculum vitae will be enhanced. As I have worked faculty, I know that it will help me in the end. The impact of well-known faculty is extremely important for career advancement. In my program, my mentor is very good about looking into summer internships. She is very well known in my area and knows a lot of people around the state and she can put us into different summer internships, which usually leads to a job when you are done. She knows what kind of things would best fit you; she can be very helpful. Anytime you go through a graduate program you get to know the faculty. Later, when you apply for a job, human resources staff will call those faculty members for references. So, whatever they have to say, will have an effect on your career advancement.”

“My change in career interest has been supported and encouraged by faculty. When I considered going the faculty route as an option, I spoke with a couple of professors and they all stated that they believed I could do it and that I had the potential. So, although it may not be career advancement now, or maybe some would not consider it advancement at all, to become a faculty member would be a significant step. Faculty have definitely impacted this belief. Honestly, before I considered being a professor, faculty impacted my career path by introducing

me to people and encouraging me to contact people. That is how I got my job in student affairs at the university.”

“If you cannot get through the program there is no way you are getting a job. If faculty do not pass you on your comps, you do not get the Ph.D. and your career does not advance. If you do not learn the knowledge and skills you need, then you will not be successful. All the different things you can be doing under the mentorship and guidance of your faculty advisor can ultimately affect your advancement. Faculty are gatekeepers. I need their signatures on my dissertation. They do not construct a program especially for me to give me the flexibility to do what I need to do in the time I need to do it. If I leave here without my Ph.D. in hand, that will seriously impact my ability to be effective in my next assignment. Plus, I will not have my Ph.D., so I need to work with the faculty to ensure that I finish.”

“Relationships with faculty and how we work with people play a part in how we are viewed by others. Because whatever the faculty are doing right now or what I do with them impacts my career in the future. Faculty mentors promote you and sponsor you for jobs. It is a game of who you know and what people say about you. So, a lot of career advancement has to do with faculty. I perform well for a professor who thinks like I do and encourages me to succeed. Their involvement with me can indirectly plant little seeds that, in the end, will help me advance in my career. I do not want to name the faculty member, but I currently have a faculty member who is almost like my mentor and he has guided me on several different jobs, and several different career tracks. I have also consulted several faculty members several times about careers and I have received some valuable advice from them.”

“One professor was only interested in students who wanted to become a professor. He basically only helped those students. He helped them make contacts, introduced them to

prominent people at conferences, and mentored these students. Faculty have their way of finding their favorites and pushing them or identifying them to recruiters or to situations where they can be employed and be productive. Not that there is anything wrong with that, I just think that type of energy should be spread around equally. One professor does not have time to mentor me academically the way I would like to have him do it, but I know it makes a big difference. He tries to connect me with folks who can do what he does not have time to do. Hopefully, by the time I graduate, things will be in line. It is not as important to me that faculty promote my career, but it is still important. For instance, I am working with a professor who has given me some insight into a career direction I want to go. I have worked with him and talked to him. He has helped me tease out and figure out my commitment in this area.”

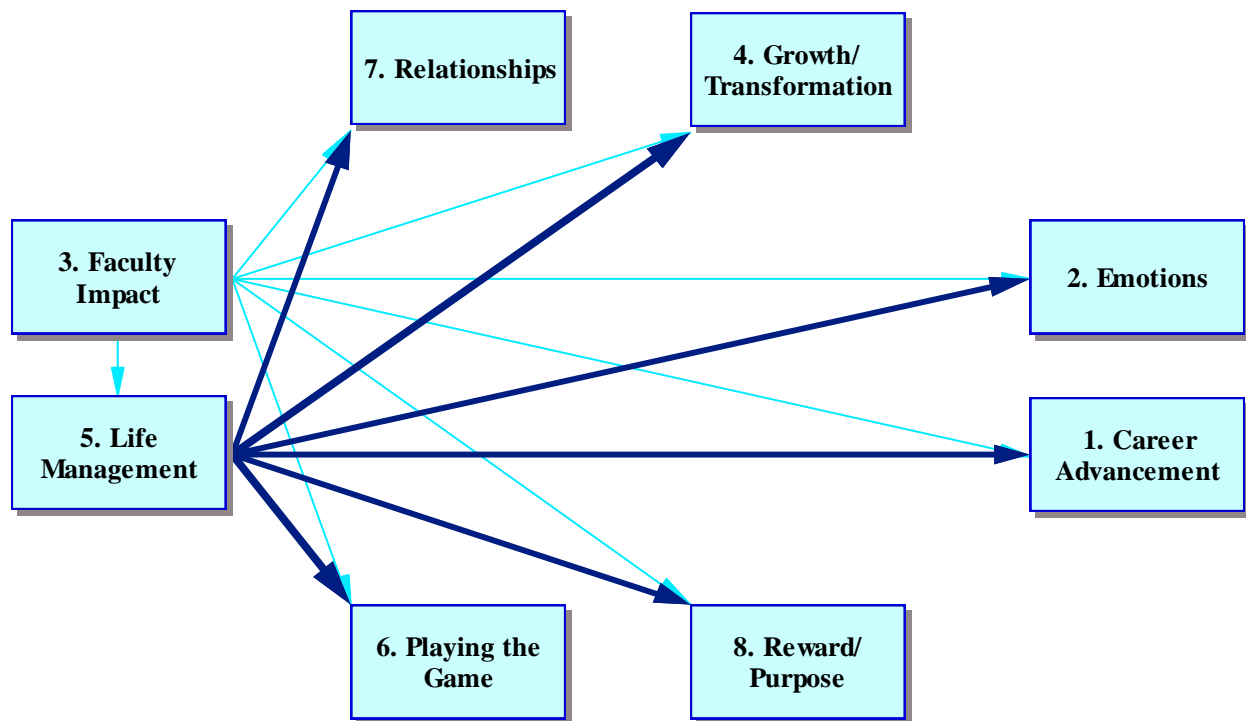
“Faculty has a hold in many of the decisions, dissertation committees, and other areas of your life and future. Faculty have a lot to do with networking and developing a pathway for career advancement, or a non-pathway. If faculty do not have a positive effect on a student’s career or do not support them, then employers will say, ‘Wow, I do not want to hire her.’ People in my school district have also taken classes with these professors, heard them give speeches, or read about them. Without faculty praise and positive comments, those people doing the hiring would roll their eyes and exclude them for a job, or with an enthusiastic reference, they might be extremely impressed and say, ‘Oh, wow, that person would be great!’ Coming into this program, I had the attitude of that I did not care where I taught. I just wanted to teach. Working with faculty, I am considering the research route. We are taught to rank research above teaching in our department. When I told my professor that I was thinking about working at a teaching school when I was done, she said, ‘You can if you want, but that is not what we are training you to do.

We are training you to be a researcher first and a teacher second. You can always teach, but the goal is for you to be a researcher.’’

“Faculty are the motivators or drivers who help you see where your career could possibly go. When you have an advisor who cares about you, works with you, helps you progress toward your career, encourages you, gives you options that might lead to advancement in your goals, then they can be highly influential. But, if they ignore you and they do not pay attention to you at all and they do not seem to give you encouragement towards your career, then you will have trouble in your graduate program and you may have to consider another option for your career.”

“You can watch faculty, emulate them, and see how they do things. You can learn from any mistakes which will help you be a better professor and further your career. They have walked the walk so their experiences are invaluable; they can show you the ropes. Faculty can teach you how to network, help you manipulate the system, help you do the things that you need to advance. Something as simple as your choice of a co-author makes a difference. If you interact with respected people in the field your faculty advisor knows, this will definitely affect your job placement later on. When you are out applying for a job, faculty or human resources call those faculty members. Faculty definitely impact the skill-set a student obtains and the strength of their academic, intellectual, and interpersonal preparation. The experiences I have had with faculty have prepared me for the advancement I will undergo in my career. If you have faculty in your corner, it can make all the difference.”

Figure 4.2. Systems Influenced Diagram – *Life Management Influences...*



Relationships  
 Playing the Game  
 Growth/Transformation  
 Reward/Purpose  
 Emotions  
 Career Advancement

#### Life Management Influences Relationships

“If you cannot manage your life, you cannot manage having a successful relationship. Managing life is about setting priorities. Realizing that there is a finite amount of time and responsibilities I must meet, the way I choose to portion my time dictates how I meet my obligations. Managing this precious resource, that is time, makes it possible to maintain the relationships that I already have and also build those that I know I need to build.”

“When I am struggling with my life, my relationships can be strained. There have been times when I was really busy. I was teaching for the first time and doing a million projects. I was

just doing too much. I would get overtired and I would get crabby. At times, I would get snappy with family and friends and say, ‘Just let me be tired.’ My mom always wants me to be happy, but I tell her that this is a really stressful time and you just need to let me be stressed. You cannot fix it for me. I just need to get through this and learn how to manage it. I have started to say no to some projects and have gotten off of others. Now my life is under control. My relationships are much better.”

“Life management drives relationships because when certain things in my life are in order, then things are really good for me. I have a tendency to call certain people that I normally do not call, because I feel good about my situation. The more in control I am of everything, the better I am to have those relationships. Nobody is fun to be around when they are totally stressed out and are not having a good time. My life management skills are not as good at the end of the semester because I have too much stuff to do. So, my relationships suffer, so I would definitely say my inability to manage at the end of the semester stops me from having quality relationships. During the first two months graduate students do not really do anything. I always think, ‘If professors gave me something to do earlier in the semester, that might not be so bad, but instead, they wait until that last month when I have five projects due in one day.’ You only have so much time, so much energy, so much money to dole out and graduate school causes you to manage life differently. You have to juggle the different balls and one of the balls is your relationships and that includes those people who just do not understand why you need to be gone all weekend working with classmates on a project.”

“The first thing I always consider is my family. I make sure that I have time for them. Since I gave birth to my son, I do not have the same relationship with my peers, because I do not have the time. Certainly, when I look at how I handle family life I have to ask, ‘Am I giving



enough attention to family when I am so involved in my graduate program?’ Certainly managing my life will affect my relationship with them. If we define life management as the home front, then the time I spend at home with my family affects my relationships with my fellow students. What I am able to handle at home, based on all the other constraints, dictates the type of relationships I will have and how rich those relationships will be.”

“The way my life is structured, I have not had the kind of relationships here that I have had in other higher education settings. Being in graduate school and working at the same time is not doing anything good for my personal relationships. It is not doing anything good for me monetarily either. You may get to know students in graduate school, but if you work full-time, if you are a parent of children, you may not have time to interact with fellow students outside of class. So, life management really influences your relationships. There are many events held on campus. If I worked on campus, I could just walk over and attend them. Since I work fifty minutes away, I have to drive fifty minutes to get to the university and then pay ten dollars for parking or circle around and find free parking and then drive fifty minutes back. I always have to decide if it is worth it to me.”

“In order to have effective relations with others, you have to have an effective relationship with yourself. If you manage your life appropriately, you will have good relationships or healthy relationships with others. Furthermore, the better you manage your life, the better your relationships within the program will be. If your life gets out of control, you cannot control those relationships. You have to make time to build relationships. So I have had to keep everything in order and keep my focus so that I could build relationships. The extent to which I can manage the little I have of my life at home influences all of my relationships, with my baby and my husband, my family and friends. You just have to make time for them.”

“How you manage your life can especially put a strain on things, like a relationship with a woman or any type of relationship outside of school. Folks have to understand why you are not as accessible like everybody else they know. If you have to study, then you need to tell your friends you cannot go and hang out with them. When I am very structured, I go to the grocery store at a certain time of day and do my laundry at another time. I take care of my business which allows me to have improved relationships with people who are important to me. When I manage my life well, I have more time to go out and build the relationships with the other people in my cohort. So, at happy hours and stuff like that, we have already learned so much from each other.”

“If you have a stable family and money is stable, you are more open to relationships. You are not stressed. You are more able to go out and have a drink with somebody. You are more able to go out to dinner. It just builds that relationship. I must make time to have relationships with other people; managing my money allows for that. If I do not have any money, I am not going to have any time to spend with my friends. They have careers and they have money. They usually say, ‘Can we get together for dinner?’ or ‘Can we meet for coffee or for the movies?’ If I do not manage my money, I cannot do the things my friends who are not in graduate school are currently able to do in their lives.”

“I have had a tough time of being on time this year. In general, this has affected both personal relationships and relationships at school. Everyone’s time is valuable. So, if you act in a way that does not match your vision of what you should be that can affect your relationship with faculty members and peers. If I am not able to effectively balance what happens at school and work, then my relationships suffer. This week, I told my girlfriend that I need time to work on a paper. That may be fine for one week, but do not try that three weeks in a row. I cannot be that

recluse. You need some type of balance with your family and friends. You cannot tell your mom, ‘I have got all these papers to write and cannot come home for the next six months.’ That is unacceptable. If you want to have meaningful relationships with people, you have to make time.”

#### **Life Management Influences Playing the Game**

“If your life is not organized, you will lose the game. A way of winning the game is to keep your life managed. For me, that means keeping my work up to date and setting family priorities so I can create time for my education. I try to have my family settled and groceries in the house so my daughter, if she is home alone, is not calling me every ten minutes reporting that she is hungry. You just have to have your life and responsibilities lined up first. You must manage your schedule and your life so that you are able to play the game.”

“If you have good life management, you are able to play the game, which is to meet the hurdles, meet the deadlines, and deal with all the bureaucracy. If we manage our money and we grow to a point where we are more independent financially and we are not beholden so much to a particular job or a particular career, we might end up having to play the game a lot less. Although, if our personal life is in disarray, we may have to play the game just to survive and finish.”

“Life management is the big picture to me. I do not want to draw a big picture and I do not want to be sucked into the bureaucracy and hurdles of graduate school. But I know that no matter how I grow or what I do, I will never change bureaucracy in school. It is more like a system. Bureaucracy is more like a system, not a personal problem. I do not want to waste a lot of time trying to fix something that will never be fixed unless the system is changed. The confidence in knowing that you have everything covered and organized and taken care of enables you to be better at playing the game.”

“I imagine that there are very few single, full-time graduate students who do not have any other responsibilities outside of school. The extent to which we manage our home and work responsibilities has a direct impact on how successful we are playing the graduate student game. I work at maintaining a strong relationship with my wife and my children because I know that if there are problems at home I will not be able to focus my mind on the work I have for school. There is a very close link between these two that I think is impossible to overstate. Managing my life comes first. I move my schedule around to accommodate other things going on. Getting the doctorate is important to me, but I attend part-time because I have other responsibilities at home.”

“You just have to be smart about it and organize your life so that you have time to play the game. Whether you are joining an organization in your discipline, even though you know you will not have the time, or something else, you just have to do it, because it is expected of you. In my first year here, when I was more vulnerable and weak in terms of my life management skills, I was feeling more frustrated about the games being played. Now I feel in control. It just does not bother me as much. The amount of game playing is still the same, but since I have more control of my life and my future, it just does not bug me as much. Their ability to impact me was not as big as I thought it was. I have the faculty behind me and that is what matters.”

“Playing the game is one of the balls you have to juggle. It is a balancing act. If you can balance your life outside of school, then when you have to go through all of the red tape at school, it is not that big of a deal. Playing the game is a nuisance, but I have to organize things so that I can take care of bureaucratic tasks. Having a healthy, whole, and happy home life is important. If things are messed up on the one end, it makes it really difficult to succeed in graduate school. You need to have a stable life so that you do not have knee jerk reactions to the

political environment. If you are not stable emotionally and in that space, you are just not going to respond well. However, without proper life management, there may not be any game to play.”

#### **Life Management Influences Growth/Transformation**

“The way you manage your life sets you up to grow and change. Scheduling time more effectively and efficiently while managing money wisely helps to expand your learning. As you continue to improve, you grow. In my previous job with regular hours, I knew what kinds of scheduling to expect. But now, scheduling in this program with required trips, site visits, and meetings, it requires more discipline. You have to be at a specified place at a specified time. In fact, you must be there ahead of time. If not, problems happen. So, this experience has helped me to better manage my scheduling.”

“The crazy schedule I keep is physically exhausting. Any other pressures like a big financial crisis, a big family crisis, or a big scheduling crisis, like my boss throwing in some mandatory, unplanned meeting can create a lot of stress and a lot of energy drain that detracts from learning. If I am really worried about family, it drains energy resources away from what I would spend in learning and growing professionally. Depleting mental energy and even sometimes physical energy, can be physically exhausting. Experiences in life management, such as scheduling time, allow you to grow through those experiences. If a student cannot manage their life, they cannot grow and transform.”

“The experiences we have with our families, the kinds of things we do in our personal life in terms of managing our time can really have an effect upon our ability to grow and really focus upon those things that would help transform us or change us as an individual. If our family is supportive and finances are relatively stable that makes the learning easier. It is more of a

fertile ground to grow when you have your support systems in place. Your ability to manage the basic necessities enables you to grow in other areas.”

“The ability in which you manage all aspects of your personal life and your student life can, like in my case, help you grow or hold you back. At the same time, becoming aware of this growth and growing through these experiences - having a baby, going to classes, finishing projects - this pushes you to the limits and makes you a better life manager. You need to be able to deal with what is happening in your home to give you the space to grow and transform. You have to plan for learning; you have to have your life set up. You have to have the money or the loans. Whatever way you do it, you must have the time management, alarms on your computer, and your homework done. I would not have this opportunity to learn if I did not plan ahead to pay for this. I am not a hardship case and I am not going to get any scholarships, so I have to be pretty much on top of my finances to make this happen.”

“If you can juggle lots of balls, then you can focus on your growth and transformation, as opposed to chasing your tail and then one day saying, ‘Darn, I have my Ph.D. and I did not accomplish other things I wanted in my life.’ I prioritize my relationship with my wife, family, and friends. That affects my growth and transformation. For example, I build my schedule around my wife’s schedule, so my relationship with my wife at home determines the classes I take. I am okay with that.”

“Outside distractions, though, impede what I am able to attain. If I am not managing my life, I am not going to be able to focus and do what I need to do to complete school. When I am in a good place in my life, it is like Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Unless I get the basics, I will not get the extra stuff. It has just been so difficult as a professional trying to manage everything. I have to manage my responsibilities at work, at home, and in graduate school. As you cope with

the stress and manage work and study, you grow. You have to transform because you keep changing. You have to manage yourself or you are going to be stuck.”

“You have probably heard, ‘God only gives us what we can handle.’ You have to be able to manage what you currently have. Once you can handle what you have, then there is an opportunity to grow. If you feel completely overwhelmed or you feel like you are underwater and cannot catch your breath there can be no growth. It starts with being able to manage those responsibilities you have within your career as a student. The management of these responsibilities can influence your whole life. You have to manage those things first and then you can grow. When things are under control it is easier to operate on a more abstract level.”

#### **Life Management Influences Reward/Purpose**

“Life management is like a process and reward is like an outcome. Like a balance, if you want to be successful at your job, you have to manage your strengths, understand your abilities, and appropriate your time. That will lead to success on all levels. If you are able to manage your money and schedule your time and make those things easy, the reward and purpose are going to come and feel good. If your life is out of whack, it is hard to get to those rewards.”

“To achieve my purpose in graduate school, I have to manage my family responsibilities and feel satisfied with myself and my life. You have to put family relationships in perspective in order to accomplish your goal. Managing life can be a reward if you can do it to everyone’s advantage, your children, yourself, your husband or wife. Fortunately, I have so much support from home to make it through this program. My kids are making sacrifices and my family is just really leaning in to try and help me out. My kids are doing things around the house that they would never have done because I do not have time to do it. My life outside school makes the journey worth the effort.”

“The reward is why I do what I do; I have a vision for myself. At the end of the day, I accomplish a lot when I have done whatever I needed to do at work and come home to help my daughter with her homework. When she comes home with a good grade from school because I have helped her with stuff that she was stuck on, I feel good. When I have cooked a meal, I know she has not gone hungry or I must buy a hamburger at Burger King. When I have done a good job on my paper and my homework is well done, that is my reward.”

“Having your life in order makes it much easier to achieve your goals. You can achieve them quicker if you know what you want, you set your goals, and you create a plan of action. When you have your life under control and stable and solid, it is easier to see where you are headed and figure out how to get there. Incorporating the curriculum and the learning environment as part of your life will allow you to take in the entire learning experience and prepare for the next step, which is an operational process that comes with its own long term rewards, whether they are financial satisfaction or a successful career.”

“Life management is all inclusive. I cannot feel fulfilled if my life is completely out of alignment. An example is when I put off doing the laundry. That clogs up my weekends and I cannot do my homework, I do not get the grade, and I do not achieve my purpose of learning. You have to fill in the squares in the appropriate column. When I started in graduate school, I endeavored to be this scholarly person and learn as much as possible. Personally, I want to have the biggest brain in the world, but now, three years into the program, my purpose is just to finish.”

“Once you get to a place where you are content in your personal life and not just within the parameters of where you work, you reach a point where you are satisfied with your reward. Life management is the foundation for graduate life, an essential element of being who I am,



how far I can go, how long I can endure before reaching my rewards. Being successful in managing my life plays a big part in the reward down the road. Without purpose, what is the point of managing anything?”

#### **Life Management Influences Emotions**

“If you do not manage your life well, you become frustrated and angry. You will also not be very productive and your emotions can get out of hand. I am all about the management of my network. I avoid, or to at least minimize, emotional baggage or drama in my life. For example, one of the reasons why I communicate with so few people is simply that, the better you manage your life, the less drama and the fewer people who bring drama into your life and impact your feelings, thoughts, and emotions.”

“Thinking of life management, managing money, scheduling time, and supporting a family can stress me out. I need to make sure that my money is set up and I have time for work. I am a teaching assistant. It gets very stressful making sure that I make time for my family and finishing everything required for school. This brings on a lot of stress, although it can bring on positive outcomes too. I have gotten it done and I am doing really well. I have learned how to manage my money and it feels really good. The more organized I am, the more stress-free and happy I am. If things are crazy and wild at home and I do not feel like I am giving enough attention to my boys, I start experiencing serious stress, fear, and anxiety. If you let emotions overrun, you then you cannot manage things the way you should.”

“If you give the proper time to all your duties and you feel relaxed, you can better manage your life, time, and duties. This will have a consequence on how you feel and how you express your emotions. If you have a bright future plan or a well-managed daily plan, you will be consistent and remain on a steady course. On the other hand, if you have chaos in your life, you

will probably be stressed out which will ultimately affect everything you do. Not managing your time well and not managing your life can create stress and frustration. This, in turn, affects your family. I try not to be too upset with myself when I slack off or do not do something I am supposed to do. Being satisfied with the way I schedule my time will make me emotionally more secure. I keep my emotions under pretty good check. If life at home is going well, I feel rested, relaxed, and also recharged. I am free of worries, able to focus, and I am happy. I am able to strike a good working balance.”

“Most of my life management revolves around school. When I get home, I am really tired and emotionally drained. Anxiety, I definitely have anxiety about managing everything that is going on in my life. That is the anxiety that I feel towards graduate school. I cannot take a 4-7 pm class more than once a week because I have to pick up my daughter from school. Once a week I have arranged for her to be picked up, but not more than once a week. When I feel like I have too much to do and I am not seeing my family, it leads to frustration. Without my life managed well, I am unable to concentrate.”

“If I face challenges in my outside life, I will react to them. I am an emotional person. For example, I was in a car accident. That threw me off-track for awhile. I was a nervous wreck for a little while. So, what goes on in my life will affect how I feel. I try to bounce all the balls, but if I let one go, I might fall apart. There are moments when I can do it and moments when I cannot. My emotions are often a manifestation of what is going on in my life. When things are out of balance and I am not handling life well, it shows in my emotions. I become moody and do not come off as the person I want to be. The more scarce time and money become, the more emotions get involved.”

“Your emotions depend upon how well you manage the other responsibilities that go along with your studies. When you know you have a limited amount of time in your day and you manage that time, it has the greatest effect. When I work systematically, I say to myself, ‘This is how much time I will be here today to help my son with his homework.’ All of that builds a better emotional situation at home. Once you realize what it is that you have to do and you manage that well, then you can start to work appropriately and create a positive home environment.”

“I am rather nice most of the time. But when I have too much on my plate, come home, and I am told that the dishwasher was not emptied, I have a tendency not to be too appreciative since I was at school for ten hours and did not have time to run home and empty the dishwasher. That kind of thing, even though it is small, can frustrate me. It is the stress level and the inability to handle all the stuff going on. Then, when I am confronted with something, I just have to deal with it. That puts me in a bad mood and it makes me either stop doing what I am doing entirely and just shut down or I actually try to fix the situation and figure out what to do. If I am upset or happy, regardless of my emotional state, I still have to take care of my life. I still have family obligations; I still have to manage my money; I still have to manage my time. Obviously, I am happier if all of those things are handled.”

#### **Life Management Influences Career Advancement**

“It is a matter of priorities whether you put career or life ahead of the other. In my case, I put managing my life ahead of my career. If you put your career advancement highest on the pecking ladder, it will have an effect on family and scheduling. If you put personal relationships and family ahead of your career, it will affect your future, because you are going to have to make

certain sacrifices. What I do at home will affect my career, since my wife and friends come first and my career comes second. If you keep the two balanced, you will do well.”

“Our ability to balance family life, manage money, and coordinate schedules affect our ability to do well in our jobs and on our ability to advance in our career. So I really think good life management skills and good home life can positively impact our career advancement. The opposite can happen too. If things are not stable in our personal life, like with family and managing money, this can negatively affect career advancement. You could have a career, but it would be very short-lived. Life management impacts jobs where you have to schedule your time very wisely and make sure that you get everything done while also supporting your family. I have had to put my career on hold because of my kids; I just could not commit the time. Now that my kids are older and, in two years, my daughter is going to be off to college, then I will have time that is not restricted. I will not have to be home by four o’clock and I can actually grow in my career.”

“Because I have young children, trying to manage my life limits the choices I have for my career and also the location. My husband is pretty much settled in one city so the thought of wandering across the country to find that perfect job is not going to be an option for me. My priority is to think about what my family needs and wants.”

“I have about two years left in this program. My boyfriend, with whom I have planned my life, and who is also in school, is finishing the last year of his undergraduate degree. We have a time conflict. He is planning to go to graduate school when he finishes, which means he may move to a different state. So with that, I would just follow him and look for an internship in that city. Coordinating my life with him will determine how I pursue my career. I may not necessarily advance immediately into my ideal career, but I will start at some level and work

toward realizing my full potential. I am going to have to find a job in the area of my study just so that I can keep my family together. I think it works both ways, too. Your family will have to work with you, but I definitely think how you manage your life affects how your career advances.”

“Although I have been at my job for five years and at the university for five years, I have had highs and lows. When I am at a good place, I am better at my job. By the same token, as a graduate student, when I am at a good place, I learn better. I am more engaged in my classes. My dad died during one of my first semesters in graduate school. I tried to jump right back into school and jump right back into classes the following spring, but I was just was not there at 100%. My life was not at a place where I could give my education the focus it needed. So, I bailed out for a semester. If you cannot manage all the stuff that is going on, then you are not going to finish your Ph.D. and you will not move forward.”

“If I am not organized at home or I have not set up where my daughter will be in the evening and I have to go to a board meeting or class, I will not succeed in my career. Today, I went to court and the judge said, ‘Turn off your cell phones!’ That means that if my daughter needs something, I cannot be in touch with her. Even though she is sixteen and going to be seventeen in a week there could be an emergency. When I was finally able to call, she was crying because she thought something had happened to me. I had not told her ahead of time that my cell phone would have to be turned off. If you are too bogged down and you are not organized with a good system in place in case something happens, you will not go far in your career.”

“The importance of managing my personal life has become all that much clearer. In advancing my career, I have had less time to manage those other aspects of my life outside my career. It just becomes that much more valuable that you develop skills balance life. I have a

great spouse who has her own career. She understands and has helped me learn how to balance professional and personal pursuits. To manage personal relationships, finances, and responsibilities of the home create opportunities in your current career. If you can manage the insanity of graduate school and all of the different variables that are going on at the same time while you are trying to complete your dissertation, then you have a better chance of being able to manage multiple projects at the same time while you are in your career.”

“If I am too preoccupied about the goings on at home or concerns about finances or I just cannot manage my time, there is no way that I can do my job effectively. If I do not do my job effectively, then I cannot advance. Moving in the military is automatic and required, but you do not necessarily always move up to a better job. Sometimes you are just moved. If people do not have their personal life in order and especially if they cannot manage their time that is a telltale sign that they cannot handle more responsibility. You have to be able to manage things in your life to be able to succeed in school. If things go wrong at home or work then you will not be able to do what you need to do to be successful in your studies.”

“You have to plan and you have to know about money. Some people borrow money to go to school and some keep working full-time so they do not have debt and try to figure out where to find time. If I am not capable of managing my life in graduate school, then I certainly cannot expect to be able to manage and advance my career. When you feel stable and confident, you have a greater ability to reach your goals. Wherever I am, I strive to improve and that allows me to produce better work.”

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graph TD; 3[3. Faculty Impact] --> 5[5. Life Management]; 3 --> 7[7. Relationships]; 3 --> 8[8. Reward/Purpose]; 5 --> 7; 5 --> 8; 7 --> 4[4. Growth/Transformation]; 7 --> 2[2. Emotions]; 7 --> 1[1. Career Advancement]; 7 --> 6[6. Playing the Game]; 7 --> 8; 4 --> 2; 4 --> 1; 4 --> 8; 2 --> 1; 2 --> 8; 1 --> 8;
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The diagram illustrates the relationships between eight factors, numbered 1 through 8. The factors are arranged in a circular pattern around a central point. The factors are:

- 1. Career Advancement
- 2. Emotions
- 3. Faculty Impact
- 4. Growth/Transformation
- 5. Life Management
- 6. Playing the Game
- 7. Relationships
- 8. Reward/Purpose

The relationships are represented by arrows:

- Thick dark blue arrows (Primary Relationships):
  - 7. Relationships → 4. Growth/Transformation
  - 7. Relationships → 2. Emotions
  - 7. Relationships → 1. Career Advancement
  - 7. Relationships → 6. Playing the Game
  - 7. Relationships → 8. Reward/Purpose
- Thin light blue arrows (Secondary or Indirect Relationships):
  - 3. Faculty Impact → 5. Life Management
  - 3. Faculty Impact → 7. Relationships
  - 3. Faculty Impact → 8. Reward/Purpose
  - 5. Life Management → 7. Relationships
  - 5. Life Management → 8. Reward/Purpose
  - 4. Growth/Transformation → 2. Emotions
  - 4. Growth/Transformation → 1. Career Advancement
  - 4. Growth/Transformation → 8. Reward/Purpose
  - 2. Emotions → 1. Career Advancement
  - 2. Emotions → 8. Reward/Purpose
  - 1. Career Advancement → 8. Reward/Purpose

## Relationships Influence Playing the Game

383

“You have to learn and accept that, in order to play the game, you must establish good relationships. As I prepared for my candidacy exams, those relationships helped me through the hurdles and helped me know what to anticipate and expect. Once the exam was over, we talked about the hurdles and what it was like for us and congratulated ourselves on passing. Sometimes you do not want to play the game but your relationships with people help you understand why it is important because it can help guide you through the maze. In the few bureaucratic instances I have seen, I was able to successfully play the game by cultivating relationships with fellow students with whom I drew strength or garnering support staff or cultivating a relationship with faculty members. In each case, I read the situation and jumped over the hurdles.”

“It all sounds really bad. But playing the game is the hurdle of the graduate experience. Relationships play the bigger role because when you build those relationships, it is easier to get over the hurdles. In order to maintain a positive relationship or not further damage a relationship, students have to play the game. If you build relationships with and rely on the wrong people, you get yourself in trouble. This is why it is important to build relationships with your graduate advisor, with faculty, other people who have gone through this before. Relationships with fellow students and former students also help because they can serve as advisors and help you understand the process.”

“I guess I differ with people about playing the game. I do not like the game. I do not see things as game playing. I know some people do and I think that is how we get in trouble and stifle our growth. I think you need to be yourself; I think you need to be real. I do know some of the game playing has been, as some people call it, the care and feeding of faculty. I think if you adjust yourself and you are sincere in your pursuit of goals, and the faculty is sincere, then you



do not have to do a great deal of game playing. I think if you are respectful of other people and you are sincere, then you really do not have to go through a lot of artificial means.”

“I think relationships should be sincere and should not be fake. Some who play the game are fake. It all relates to politics - the power thing. You make connections with people, like a professor focused on scholarship. If you have a good relationship with this person, you do what you need to do. So you are playing the game, because you have a connection with that person and you do not want to mess that up. One of the members I selected for my dissertation committee is a friend of a friend. He is a new faculty member here. I knew awhile back that I wanted to ask this person to be on my dissertation committee. So I started to build that relationship first before I came right out and said, ‘Would you please be a member of my dissertation committee.’ It took some time to build the relationship, to help him understand what was important to him, but he is now on my committee.”

“Building peer relationships with other Ph.D. students allows you to share more information, insights, and strategies so that you can navigate the bureaucracy and play the game of graduate school better. Your friends are also playing the game, so you can learn from them as well. I learn so much from my colleagues. They help me to know what professors to pick, what course to take, and in what order. Even if my advisor advises against some decision I have made, my fellow students can convince me there is a better way to do things. When you see people networking well, you want to mimic that ability or find peer mentors who can help you with the bureaucracy. They lead by example. If you have good relationships with most people, it is easier to play the game. A well-liked person is far more likely to keep his or her job, get ahead, and achieve their goals. On the other hand, I have a full-time job, so I am not as invested as a full-

time student. Many people do not have the luxury to go back to school and get their Ph.D.. So, it really is a luxury and I am glad to have it, but it also means that my relationships suffer.”

“In my relationships with fellow doctoral students, I have learned to manage them, but I do not let it bug me if I feel them playing games with me. I am not their friend. I am just a fellow doctoral student. I can let that relationship have distance. That way, when the games come up, I can take a step back. If you have strong relationships or you have friendships within the cohort or within your unit, if you have people that you can go to then they will tell you how to navigate the process and get to the next step, chart your course, and if you have any questions you have someone to ask. If do not have people to ask then you feel like you are alone and when you are alone then you cannot play the game very well.”

#### **Relationships Influence Growth/Transformation**

“As your relationships build, you continue to grow and become more confident. Your ability to deal with relationships, both positive and negative, affect how well you grow or the direction of your growth. This process enables you to learn lessons that help you grow as a person. Relationships teach you to be patient or to deal with relationships with patience. Learning patience spreads not just to those relationships, but in other environments as well. I have never been good at patience, but as I get better, this also demonstrates a form of growth. Tact was also never my strong point. It still is not, but it is a lot better than it was years ago.”

“We have to work with our peers so much in this program and the better relationships you have with them, the more effective the group work will be, and the better the learning will be. My peers are an important part of my growth and transformation, both the type and quality of those relationships. If my interaction with peers is positive and I make friends, it easier and there is a more fertile ground to grow and learn. It is more difficult when the relationships in the cohort are strained. I think relationships will cause you to grow if you invest in them.”

“Relationships factor in greatly, because the people with whom you work and depend upon can help you. By developing that relationship, you can understand a position from their vantage point. If that does not make you grow, you should just go home. Many times you discuss things with your colleagues, especially those who are in your same program and you learn different things. As I talk with other people who are in my same position, I compare their experiences and what they have learned. What they have done helps me to know what I need to do. Additionally, relationships help you to become more introspective and understand yourself better so that you are better able to get through the process. You learn from your friends, see how others handle situations, and model good attributes. As you continue to grow, you crave that kind of interaction to keep growing and learning. My peers are an important part of my growth and transformation.”

“My mentor has definitely helped me grow and has shown me that this program is the perfect fit for me. Faculty show you how to do write and get material published. Because of their relationship with you, you grow and develop more thoroughly conceived ideas; you also get things published. If you have a good relationship with your professors, your friends, and your cohort, you will grow, but if you have bad relationships, you will probably have less desirable results and that will affect your growth. If my relationships are askew or if I am having trouble with certain people, I will not be as capable of and driven to expand and grow or even to seek out situations where this is possible. I do not always see eye to eye with my professors. While there is more that I would like to learn, because we differ greatly in our perspective, I am limited to asking questions within the normal scope. This affects my ability to grow.”

“My multi-cultural affiliations have changed and transformed my life. By having relationships with people in other cultures, I get to live their cultures with them. Based on those

relationships, I get useful information about different perspectives which influence my experiential learning. I have a classmate from Israel with an excellent background in political communications. She was against a direction we were going. We talked about it and our relationship served as a support system so that she could continue researching her area of interest.”

“My roommate was in the same master’s program I went through. She started talking about the whole topic of networking. I have never been able to objectively analyze my own ability to network, but with her, both of us are now able to do it. Without that relationship, I might never have had that growth in networking, because I have never been able to see it objectively.”

“It is all about the relationships you build. I feel as though God places people in our lives because we are supposed to learn something from each and every one of them. When I think of my growth and transformation as a graduate student, I automatically think of the great relationships with family, peers, faculty, staff, library workers, and other people who have been part of this journey with me. It is the sum total of our relationships that define us as individuals. My friends have also encouraged me to be the best that I can be and helped me tap into my potential.”

“In the end I want to get done, collect my research, and complete my dissertation, so relationships with others is very important. The more relationships I form, the more I learn and the more I grow as a professional, an individual, and a student. By forging these bonds, I learn how to better interact with different personalities, become more effective, and understand various viewpoints. These interactions in study groups, advising relationships, and sharing our sense of

humor help me survive the entire graduate experience. Hopefully, I will be a wiser person at the end, but I do not know.”

#### **Relationships Influence Reward/Purpose**

“If you put your family, career, and friendships aside and let life fall apart, there will not be much of a reward at the end. I think you have to maintain things in your life, cultivate your relationships, and start new ones in order to accomplish your reward and purpose. The purpose of coming here and doing well is to further my relationship with my children and become a happier person. If the relationships with my family are not intact, I will not gain any personal reward whatsoever. I do not think you can retain your purpose for pursuing graduate studies if you are unable to maintain the relationships you have in this experience.”

“I get a lot of joy out of my relationships and they are a large part of my reward. Positive relationships with your peers and friends will make it easier for you to reach your goal. The relationships I have with students and faculty help me realize where I need to go. Relationships positively impact my outcome. My relationships are rewarding; they help me to continue to define my purpose. It is the enabling aspect of the program, the positive part that gets you to the goal and objective. My closest relationships have encouraged me to realize goals that I have set and subsequently achieve them.”

“The reward is the satisfaction with the job that is done. Developing strong relationships with my peers, family, and faculty help build this big mosaic of things that figure into that reward. When I look back and think about the satisfaction I obtained with the job well done, I tie in the relationships built during that effort. Drawing all of the positive aspects out of my relationships, the relationships I have built are part of the reward of the whole experience. I have

a friend in the department and we are constantly thinking of business ideas to do together. So, that drives our sense of purpose here at school.”

“All the colleagues and people I have met along the way have made a big difference in my ability to feel included, like I am not going at it alone. A team spirit is achieved, especially if you come in under a cohort group. You start developing relationships from the very beginning and you feel close to those people. Even when you are down, they will pick you up and say you have to keep going. They are your encourager and your cheerleaders to get you through graduate school. Because of the nature of cohorts, networking, and the fact that these folks will be presidents, vice presidents, and hiring authorities, with the right relationships you can achieve your desired position. If I have close friendships with people I trust, then I am rewarded both in the short term and in the long term.”

“One helpful professor agreed to be my methodologist and that relationship will hopefully help me reach my goal because before this, I was stuck as to who, what, how, and why I was going to continue with my dissertation. I respect, admire, and appreciate this professor who is actually somebody I would want to spend the next year of my life with. This also holds true for the three committee members I have at this point. The relationship I have with them will help me get to where I am headed. I have chosen people with whom I have a good relationship to help me because that just seems easiest and logical.”

“Relationships with faculty on your dissertation committee help or hinder reaching your goal. If it is with your family or friends, they can be supportive or they can be a pain in the butt in helping you reach your rewards and purpose. You are going to build so many different types of relationships both positive and negative. I would not have made it through without some of the classmates in my cohort. We have not had the same classes together all the time, but we keep

reminding each other why we are here and how much we have put into this. You know, sometimes I am the weak one and they say to me, ‘Alright let us do this and get it together.’ Or sometimes I have to be the one that plays that role. It works both ways. Building those relationships definitely helps me get to the end of the program.”

“The reward is part of the learning process. The relationships I have with the faculty members, with my colleagues, and with my co-workers, will affect my ultimate reward. For example, one of my co-workers is in a similar situation. He has a family, a wife, and two children. He is a part-time doctoral student and he works full-time. My relationship with him as a co-worker and student is a reward, because not only are we in similar situations, but we also learn a lot from each other.”

“The relationships I have with my students sustain me. A small percentage of the students I teach sustain me against the large percentage of students who have no interest in what they are doing and may not even want to be in college right now. On the other hand, I could say that my purpose is to work with students and that alone is rewarding. My closest relationships have encouraged me to realize goals that I have set and subsequently achieve them. My close relationship with my sister gave me the confidence to apply since I did not have much experience and I got accepted! The external encouragement plays a part in the internal self-esteem you have as a student. Those external relationships are important because when you feel like quitting, or when you ask yourself, ‘Why did I go back to school?’ Those with whom you are in close relationship remind you that you had a purpose and you can do it.”

“My sister did not appreciate the fact that I was leaving the workforce to return to school. Every time I talked to her, she made me feel that what I was trying to accomplish was selfish. There was a period when I felt that way too about my graduate experience. Now, when I get

discouraged, I look at my friends and see them finishing classes, writing their dissertation, and getting their Ph.D.. We are all trying to get by. Often it is your friends who remind you what you are doing in this place when you do not want to go any farther.”

“I put a great deal of importance on relationships. They provide me with a great deal of joy and some of the greatest rewards I could ever want. If your reward is serving others and if you have good relationships with the people who put you there, help you finish, and support you, you will be able to help more people in the future and make your life purposeful. Relationships make me feel a sense of accomplishment. I gain pride because I made new connections and those new connections will not only help me grow as an individual, as a person, and as a professional, but also with my career. If I were a celebrity, I suppose my status in the world might attract relationships, but that is certainly not the case. No one is trying to get after me because I am a graduate student. I constantly think about what I want to achieve, my long term goal, and how I can develop avenues for collaboration. My relationships add a sense of depth to the program that maybe I could never get from a book. Good relationships lead to the road less traveled, which will, in turn, lead to reward and purpose.”

#### **Relationships Influence Emotions**

“The interaction you have with peers can often allow you to sort out your feelings and emotions, the stress, anxiety, and fear associated with graduate school. Relationships can make you happier and less stressed. They are critical in keeping your emotions in check. If you have good relationships with your friends, your family members, and your faculty you will probably feel good. My relationships give me great joy. Friendships help pull you through the times when you feel like giving up. Many times my relationships, whether it is with family, close friends, or colleagues, help me continue with the graduate program. These relationships help me look



toward the end and feel like obtaining my doctorate is something I am able to accomplish. These relationships help me keep going.”

“When the relationships are not supportive or are petty, depending on which form they take, they are very detrimental to the emotions. When they are positive, they are very positive. If people around you are supportive, you are more likely to handle the stress and anxiety better than if people are constantly ridiculing you or questioning you. Support from friends and colleagues can help keep you emotionally balanced when you get stressed out. An example of that includes relationships with classmates who help me feel positive about the program and my career. We empathize with one another about our work-load and talk together in order to sort out our feelings and emotions. Sometimes, based on our relationship, we figure out how to focus that emotion.”

“Good relationships mean you are a happy camper. I had some issues with a professor recently. I was able to dump that on a friend and burden her as well. It was somewhat cathartic, because I could have explored some options with another grad student who was stepping back from the situation, but that did not seem appropriate. If you feel a part of the group and people encourage you, you will have a stronger sense of self, versus if you feel you are not making any connections. You may feel alone on the journey. My family and my friends mean absolutely every to me. So, if my relationships are strong then my emotional health is through the roof. But, if my relationships are suffering, then I feel awful. Most of my life revolves around school, so my girlfriend, my friends, even my dog help me balance my emotions.”

“When things have been rocky in the cohort, it has really been stressful for me. Even though I was not at the center of the cohort’s discord and it was usually not aimed at me, I still find it very stressful. When the relationship challenges are big, the emotions are big. When

relationships are bad, emotions are bad. Negative relationships create stress. We are all human beings so our relationships definitely influence our emotions. If you feel like you are working well with your faculty and your classmates, then you feel good. But if you feel like you are ignored or you are not good in relationships with other people, you feel very bad.”

“In graduate school you do not have as much time for your friends, especially if they are not in graduate school as well. They often do not understand why you do not have time for them. The same happens if your spouse has not been through the graduate experience. They might not understand how political it is. In my case, I am happy my husband went first. He knows that the Ph.D. program does not allow time for anything else. Also, the whole range of emotions you experience in graduate school due to various factors might impact your relationships. If you are frustrated and angry all of the time, it might lead to some deterioration in your relationships with everybody else.”

“The strength of your relationships at home, among your classmates, and with faculty all influence the way you experience graduate school. The strength of my relationship with my wife and her constant support allows me a certain level of freedom. I do not have to worry that she is feeling left out; I do not have to worry that she is upset; I do not have to wonder if she feels that I am spending too much time away from home. We talk about it. So, the relationship, the communication is there, which frees me to do what needs to be done so that I do not have to worry and I can expend my energies toward continuing this program.”

“I have gotten quite close to some people in graduate school. I have also built negative types of relationships with people in graduate school who have rubbed me the wrong way. For example, I worked on a team project with somebody who was very controlling and did not pull their own weight. This generated negative feelings. Also, I have experienced the opposite with

people who have helped me and sincerely gave of themselves. They have been both generous and kind. Since there is an age difference between many of the students – quite a big age difference between my colleagues and myself - I try develop positive relationships with everyone. For example, one time when I took one of my first statistics courses, a group invited me into their study group. I brought homemade goodies to the study group. It was really reinforcing to them for me to be in the group, even though I was an old fuddy-duddy to them. At the end of the semester, I gave them Starbucks gift cards because I loved them so much.”

““Which comes first, the chicken or the egg?’ Initially, you have to have emotion to have a relationship. Once that relationship is formed, that is when you have the biggest impact of emotion. A faculty member asked to collaborate on a paper, which I thought was amazing. Working together to write a joint paper is a great opportunity for me and has made me ecstatic. When things are going well with friends, family or professors or anybody, I am usually in a good mellow place. It works the other way too. When I am pissed off, it affects my relationships. When I put time in my relationships and I am not slacking, that has more impact on my emotions. Also, the closer you are to a person, the more they impact your life. I know if my mom is upset with me, my whole day is done.”

“When my major professor died in January, it was a big kick. That was really sad; I just did not expect it to happen. I had a great relationship with him. The degree I wanted and the classes he steered me to were a perfect match. He understood my value and my purpose. He was concerned about me as a person and as a student, not as a TA or employee of his. He considered what was the best for me even if it was not the best for him. Now, I have to build new relationships in order to finish the program and achieve my goal. Without relationships I would not be anywhere. My advisor is excellent, but I have to work hard at building relationships,

because I commute from quite a distance and I am not on campus all the time. I do not have a chance to see my advisor much. When I have any confusion about the program, or some difficulties, the only thing I do is e-mail her, but sometimes I become frustrated when I do not have enough help.”

#### **Relationships Influence Career Advancement**

“Relationships play the big role in achieving your career goals. It has often been said, ‘It is not what you know; it is who you know.’ Although that is often said in a negative light, I do not see it that way. The relationships that you have developed along the line, the connections you have made will definitely effect your career advancement. You have to have good working and personal relationships with people in order to advance. Collaborative efforts are essential. We work with our advisors and mentors and they, in turn, know people in the field. They have the ability to hire you, refer you, and tell you about what is happening. Also, throughout your experience you will network with your peers who will end up in very good positions or at least know about jobs.”

“Almost every career I have had and every situation I have been in has required that you mend good relationships. You have to develop good relationships and the more good relationships you have the more opportunities you have for career advancement. By having friends in institutions or being known by people of the governing body, you can be promoted to a higher position. Also, the relationships you make in graduate school can carry on for years and years. The people you meet - peers, connections, faculty, mentors - those informal networks definitely contribute to the opportunities you will have as you move through your program and once it is completed. Ultimately, they can determine where you go and how your career advances.”

“If you do not have supportive friendships within the office, in the classroom, outside in the field, at home, among your friendships, with ex-professors, mentors, and other people, then you are going to have a very difficult time advancing in your career. The networking you do while you are in graduate school, whether it is with professors or with your peers, relationships will help you advance. Conceivably, those people with whom I have developed relationships could later say, ‘Hey, I know him, he’s a good guy.’ Having a good relationship with my advisor and with other profs has gotten me good recommendations for things like the Fulbright for which I am currently applying.”

“In a cohort, if we do not get it done together, we will not achieve our outcome. We are tight-knit here as graduate students. We have to manage relationships with faculty and the cohort to develop, obtain a good career, and be successful. If a person cannot handle multiple relationships and nurture these relationships, then they are not going to advance in their careers. When you learn how to develop better relationships, you understand how groups work, you understand how to deal with power authorities, and all those other things that are involved with graduate school. You become better equipped for success in any career you have. If you are going to be an administrative leader, you are much better equipped to handle that if you can handle the relationships of the people that are around you and be able to work together with people. It is about working together, understanding diverse beliefs, handling adversity, and managing multiple projects.”

“Everyone in our cohort will potentially become an administrator somewhere two to three years down range and potentially could be either an employer or a co-worker. Those relationships definitely will determine the future of my career. My peers have a positive impact on my career advancement because they help me understand the duties, responsibilities, and

possibilities in the job. The strength of relationships and your ability to have relationships in the first place ultimately put you in a position to help you advance. Relationships are part of networking and getting to know people who later on can help you with your career choices or help you get a particular position when they hiring.”

“I talk with people who have the same goals I have and I figure out what they are doing to help advance and then that influences me and the decisions that I make. With good relationships, you have your network intact, your contacts in place, and your name out there and known to a few more individuals in the world. The relationships I built have carried me far and I know I will be in touch with all these folks for a long time.”

“When you seek a new job or are looking for a new career, even within the same corporation or academic institution, you have to know people in order to advance. In fact, there is a great book out there that says that if you know six people, you know six million people because the six people that you know and those six other people and each one of those six other people know six other people and that is how you can form a network of people. Relationships are extremely critical and that is what it is all about in graduate school. It is forming those networks, forming those relationships, and building the right kinds of relationships with the right people can really make a huge difference in forwarding your career.”

“Career advancement has to do with relationship building. It is called the emotional bank account. You have a relationship with somebody and when you are doing good things a positive relationship results and your career goes great and everything is smooth sailing. Then a bad thing happens, like you miss an appointment, do not show up for a meeting, or miss a deadline. It depends on how much emotional money you have in that bank account or whether you are overdrawn as to whether or not you get in trouble or your superior severs ties with you or

manipulates a project you are working on. How you build and spend your account determines your career advancement.”

“Networking is important. If you know people, they will call you and say, ‘Hey, there is a job opening here that might interest you. You should apply.’ This also helps build relationships as you build your career too and help others. Even though you have a lot of knowledge, you have years of experience teaching, and you have numerous publications, if you do not have somebody else who tells you, ‘You should apply to that, the position is empty, they need somebody else,’ you may never have a great job. So networking is very important. Relationships between faculty, friends, and other graduate students are important because we are all researchers. Sometimes it requires collaboration and working together and making connections. So if you are good at making relationships with the faculty and other graduate students, you will improve your career. My first job after I left the Ph.D. program in government was purely because of a relationship I developed.”

“You must form relationships in order to have a successful work environment. Working with other people is something that is very important to me. I do not think I could be in this field and stay isolated. One of my professors is fond of saying, ‘It is all about the relationships.’ I agree with that to a significant degree. Knowing people can help to open the door is helpful, but you will still have to perform once you are through the door. We do not live as individuals on our own islands. We have to be able to rely on our relationships to be successful and we have to help others achieve their goals, too. Relationships open doors, but your skills and experience determine your success and advancement. Relationships you have with certain people can help or hinder you. Relationships with my wife, colleagues, friends, people here, are going to affect what

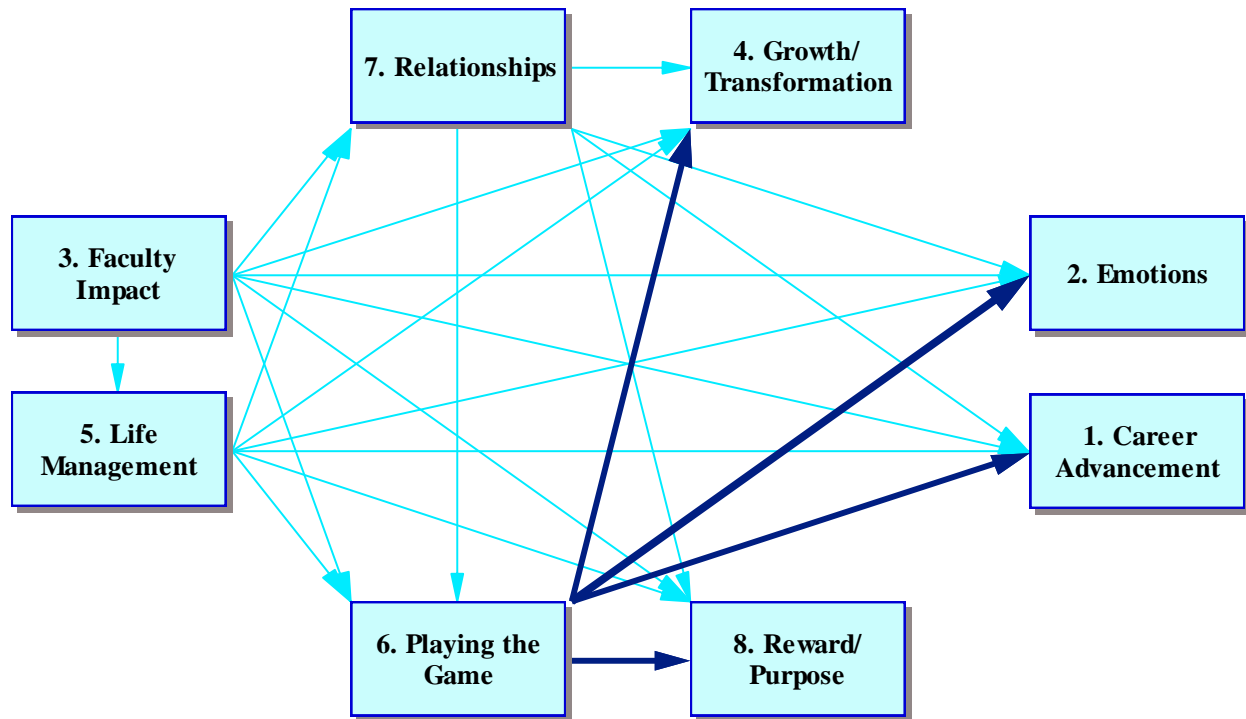
I do and how I do it. If your spouse is supportive, it will matter. Family responsibilities can change things and maybe relocation is not an option or time is not an issue.”

“In one speaking event, I became very nervous. I had to give a PowerPoint presentation in front of the school board which was being broadcast throughout the city. I had to do this quite frequently. At one point, I had to do it under the tutelage of a department superintendent who was above me and she had rules about PowerPoint presentations. You could only have five slides and each slide could only have three bullets, and there had to be a note space underneath the slide. My relationship with her was a strained one and so I was nervous and very frustrated. After one of those presentations, I cried because of my frustration. That was a gauntlet that stopped my career path. If I was looking to move up, that was a strike against me and all because of my relationship with her, my communication, and the way that PowerPoint fiasco played out.”

“Your relationships in the program play a big part in eventually finishing and getting to the end. The professional relationships you build now affect how far you are going to go. You will also cultivate personal relationships with people. At the end of the day, people are going to have to want to work with you. The more you get out into the world, you can connect with people on different levels. If you are a total recluse and you are just someone to hold yourself back, you might go far in your career, but you had better be brilliant. Aside from that it is all about how you relate to other people. If you have support systems, then you can make great things happen.”



Figure 4.4. Systems Influenced Diagram – *Playing the Game Influences...*



**Growth/Transformation**  
**Reward/Purpose**  
**Emotions**  
**Career Advancement**

#### **Playing the Game Influences Growth/Transformation**

“If you do not play by the rules, you will never achieve what you want and you will never grow. As much as I dislike playing the game, this is a part of life. You sometimes have to do things that you do not want to do. If you jump over all of the hurdles throughout this graduate experience, then you will achieve growth. Being a graduate student, you just learn to do what needs to be done. You need to know how to position yourself and the issues you are dealing with in order to get to that point where you can transform yourself into a better manager, a better teacher, and a better student.”

“Playing the game is definitely part of growth as a student. If I want to take a class with a certain professor or have someone on my committee, I need to play the game. At the same time, my growth as a graduate student helps me to be better able to play the game. If I want to learn something, I need to be on people’s good side. If I do not have the people I want in my life, then I certainly will not get the growth I seek. You have to follow the rules. If you do not know the time to apply for your comps or how to schedule your proposal event, or how to complete an IRB, you will not be able to move forward. Plus, if I want to graduate in the soonest possible time, I have to take three more classes: two classes in another department and one more methods class. There are other classes I would like to take, but I cannot, if I want to fulfill these requirements.”

“What I have learned so far is that you cannot check off box number four unless you have checked off box numbers one, two and three, even though box number four may have nothing to do with what you are trying to do at the end of the day. It is just part of the bureaucracy. Part of playing the game is doing stuff that sometimes does not make sense and its purpose is incomprehensible. Research is especially enjoyable, but I do not like to set deadlines. Although I may not enjoy it, I am learning to make more clearly defined timelines. If you play the game well, you are given more opportunities to learn. Navigating new experiences makes you worldly, wise, and thoughtful about how the world functions. Especially in my case, I was in the same type of job for eighteen years. I became jaded that I was stuck on a narrow track. I did not play the game and did not grow.”

“To get it done, I needed to play the game. The better I played the game, the more I grew and transformed. Playing the game is about sacrifice. Sometimes you have to restate your priorities in order to get to the goal. Not playing the game can keep you from learning what you

need to learn and being able to apply the knowledge properly. First, you must learn how to navigate politics. Second, the better you are at playing the game, the better you are at working in politically charged environments. Third, as you grow as an individual, you grow in your career. Your growth depends upon how well you play the game, whether it is with your professors, advisors, colleagues, or what have you.”

“If I am a good player in this bureaucracy, I can grow here. I am still learning how to play the game and it will take some time. Bureaucracy is a factor in the learning process. Barriers and long lists of requirements prevent some people from finishing their degree. Picture yourself in South Korea or Japan. You first have to learn the culture. However, I realize that if everybody else is playing and I am not playing, that is not smart. You just have to realize that you may not necessarily like doing this, but you got to do what you got to do to get what you want to get. That is transformation.”

“I guess playing the game affects your growth, because you are forced to examine your motives under a microscope. You have to think, ‘Do I even want to do this?’ or ‘Why am I bothering to do this?’ The other day in class everybody in the room said they were tired of graduate school, tired of being poor, and simply tired and exhausted. Someone said, ‘Why are we all here? Why would any room full of people put themselves through this?’ We all decided we were doing this for personal satisfaction and that, later on, good things might happen.”

“If you play the game, you are given more opportunities to learn. If you are able to jump through those hoops and cross those hurdles, you will be able to do something that is growth enhancing or transformative. Jumping over the hurdles has forced me to grow individually as a person. I have acquired some ability to do it, which, given the academic environment, seems to

be essential. The more hurdles I overcome, the more my learning develops. Each time, I grow as a learner. I have to go through the process in order to grow. No pain. No gain.”

“However, I feel that if I was really pressured to have to play the game all the time, it would affect my ability to grow as a person and to become all that I could be in terms of my potential. I know that the people who run our programs are forced into a lot of politics and game playing. That sometimes has a trickle-down effect on us as students. I play the game more than you know. I am not comfortable with saying I play the game, but truth be told, I have definitely done it. I have learned a lot from having to play the game. It is not always easy to grow, but it happens.”

#### **Playing the Game Influences Reward/Purpose**

“If you play the game and win, you get your reward. If you do not play the game, then you are left in the same place you started. If the reward is graduation and moving into a leadership position or an academic position, then you have to understand the rules of the graduate school game and play it successfully. In this game, everyone has a role to play. Students play their role. Faculty play their role. Support staff play their role. But, since earning this doctorate is my goal, I have to make sure I understand everyone’s role because I cannot afford for any player in this game to keep me from achieving my objective. In graduate school, as in any professional environment, you have to know how to play the game to get to the end result.”

“There is this dichotomy here. If you play the game and do not feel good about it, no matter what position you get or what monetary compensation you obtain, you are not going to feel good about yourself in the process. That is why I would say playing the game can affect your reward. If you are playing the game to get ahead and achieve those tangible rewards, that is a decision that you have to make. The only reason to get involved in academic politics is because

you have a goal. Even when you play and you do not want to play, but you play with integrity, you ultimately know that it leads to your rewards. Definitely playing the game drives reward and purpose because you have to get through the process in order to get the rewards.”

“If you do not want it enough, you are not going to be here next week. Some of the hurdles are difficult and arduous. It takes most students a couple of months just to get their IRB approved. If you do not play well, get frustrated, or are bogged down with the game and all its rules, your result may be an ABD. My reward for the all of my effort is to finish graduate school and get my degree. If this means that I have to play the game to have this happen, I will play.”

“I like a challenge. You can learn a lot from playing the game. When you do your work well and put yourself in a good light, you are in a better spot to focus on what you are doing as opposed to being scatterbrained with a zillion things going on. The semesters where I mess up and do not pay my bill in time, where I lose my classes and I have to go back, I get no reward for that. Playing the game correctly does assist in receiving rewards and doing my purpose. The better you play the game, the more rewarding and purposeful you find your experience because you understand it; you understand the game.”

“Playing the game is something you have to do if you want success in your environment. For example, if your reward is to earn your diploma, you must form a committee, complete an IRB, write a proposal, arrange a mutually agreed upon time to present, create a presentation, obtain signatures, complete documents for graduate studies committee approval, get statements signed by interviewees, arrange focus groups, and so on through a long list of guidelines. Only after you have completed a very long list of steps can you begin to write your dissertation, receive your reward, and graduate.”

“I do not want to sound like I am doing gamesmanship to get my doctorate, but if you do not play the game, the myriad of requirements will crush you. On my dissertation committee, I have to schmooze and smile when I really would just like to write one of my members off. In order to get the reward, which is the degree, their signature must be on my dissertation. When you have been beaten down by the man, your purpose changes. Yet, if you deal with those hurdles well, then you will be successful in getting your degree and you will feel reward and pride. My reward and purpose remains the same. I still want the degree and I still want to have a position where I have value. That does not change. You play with integrity, but you know that it is about achieving your purpose in life. After you overcome the hurdles, jump through a series of hoops, and meet the deadlines, there is a reward. I think playing the game is necessary to obtain your reward or purpose. Your skill and success at playing these games influence whether or not you get that reward. To get to the reward place in life, you have to be effective in playing that game.”

#### **Playing the Game Influences Emotions**

“Playing the game often leads to an emotional response because you have to do what is not natural and sometimes uncomfortable. Going through any bureaucracy, but particularly graduate school, getting courses, approvals, and generally understanding what you have to complete, inevitably encounters snags. It is scary at times knowing that I have to play the game and not knowing if I am doing each process right. Many times that brings up a lot of anxiety for me and also some level of irritation.”

“Playing the game frustrates me, and if it is not playing the game, it is the idea that I need to play the game. I generally associate playing the game with shady characters who do not have the drive, talent, or ability to get there by being honest. You do not have to stab somebody in the

back to get where you want. If you use skill, talent, and hard work you usually get there. However, when I play the game, I feel like I am compromising myself and it angers me. When I feel I am playing the game and not really liking it, I feel a huge sense of stress and anxiety. Sometimes it is frustrating to know you have to play the game.”

“I can be in a great mood, but if my IRB does not come through, that puts me in a bad mood. Each stage of going through the hurdles, I experience different emotions. For example, anxiety when studying for an exam and stress while taking an exam causes me to be irritable. When I am finished and find out I have passed, I feel really good. Then I am ready for the next hurdle. The hurdles make me stressed, because if I cannot climb over one in time, it is hard to correct. I want things to be smooth, but when I have to navigate the bureaucracy, it causes negative emotions.”

“When you get completely frustrated because of all of the red tape and your advisor puts up a brick wall in front of you, you cannot tell your advisor the choice words you are thinking. You are in a vulnerable position. You can only say what is politically correct to say. Otherwise, your brick wall will be completely impenetrable. The consequence is that you will not get your degree. You cannot even show all of the emotions you are feeling. If someone says something that really offends you, you have to swallow it and let it slide. Later, when you go home, you can let it out, but not at the university where you can be kicked out for inappropriate comments.”

“It is just a very stressful experience. I am not a usually stressful person, so playing the game affects my emotions. Sometimes I am anxiety-ridden which leads to even more fear and frustration. When I cannot manage the relationships with my faculty or administrative requirements, I feel stressed. How I deal with the stress and how I deal with people does affect my outcome. Playing the game makes me angry, but it is something I have to do to survive.”

“Sometimes you just want to know why. You may not understand the reason you must do certain things at certain times. This leads to frustration. When you ask why, you often hear, ‘That it is because this is the way the department is set up.’ They could care less about your needs. Furthermore, you can be out of control because you cannot change rigid rules or uncompromising bureaucracy. If there are policies you really do not like and you try to bypass them, like a program review or a required proposal, you still have to do them. I just had a baby and left the program for awhile. Although I thought I would not be able to do it, every step of my proposal was still required. I e-mailed my advisor and she postponed the deadline for me.”

“When I first applied for my certification, I came to find out that I was one class short. Although I had a class advisor and I thought I had completed all of the coursework needed to apply for certification, I could not go on without this class. This was after I passed the Board exam and all that fun stuff. Now, I am short a class. That is just the way it goes. I just have to take the class and get recommended for certification next semester.”

“This is a process you have to get through. Therefore, you cannot let your emotions override playing the game, because if you let your emotions get in the way of finishing your program you cannot do all of the other things you must do to advance your career. Playing the game is just the cost of doing business. Like with my dissertation committee, I have made peace within myself about what I have to do and who I have to have on my committee to get through this. I am okay with it now. It took me awhile to get there, but I had to make a conscious effort to deal with my emotions.”

“Before I came into the program, I learned important lessons that helped me understand the way the system here works. That allowed me to enter the cohort with a certain amount of experience. Some of my classmates became easily frazzled by all of the rules and hoops they



encountered, but if you consider the entire experience as a whole and the value of the big picture of what you are trying to accomplish, it is much easier. On the other hand, if you only look at the day to day challenges as they come at you, then everything can be overwhelming. Some of my classmates became emotional. The better you understand the process, the better you understand your part, the more you can be in control. If you become engulfed in the experience, you can lose sight of the big picture. You know what you have to do. You know that you have to study to pass your test. You may cry, but knowing what you have to do helps you stay focused. You can get mad, but you have to do it. Emotions are the beneficiary or the basket that catches all of these things. I do not see my emotions affecting anything. My emotions are generally pretty much neutral until somebody pokes them.”

“In graduate school, you have to know the lay of the land. You have to be responsible too. You might register for the wrong class because you do not know the right one you are supposed to take until it is too late to drop and add another class. The first semester, studying philosophy, I had a hard time because I did not know enough philosophy. My professors assumed I knew everything and could connect all of the dots. They talked at such a high level. It was very frustrating, since I was not in my comfort zone. Sometimes I just want to give up, but I have got to keep going if I want to finish.”

#### **Playing the Game Influences Career Advancement**

“Since playing the game, in my mind, is largely a function of the care and feeding of faculty and since the faculty influence career advancement, then clearly, playing the game influences career advancement. Your future is determined by the faculty’s perception of you. So, you must learn how to play the game in order to advance, because you have to get into the door somehow. If you do not play the game the correct way, you are never going to get to that

position, so it can be a big obstacle. The better you play the game, and the more you understand the politics, the better your career is going to go. I just think all careers are political. No matter whether you are in the academia, the corporate world, or anywhere, playing the game drives career advancement. It is part of the process. It is like being culturally competent. Once you start, it comes naturally.”

“There are certain people you do not want to cross, certain people that you do not want to listen to, but you have to realize that you cannot just go in and do your job because you have to watch the political environment. A specific example was when I had to be diplomatic with a junior professor who was taking over for my advisor. I tried to be diplomatic with that person, since that faculty member was in an authority position over me. That person did not understand my work as well as I wanted. If you do not know how to play the game, to some degree, you will commit those terrible faux pas that will throw roadblocks in front of your career advancement.”

“If you do not play by society’s rules, you will be face first in the mashed potato at dinner. You will never be invited back again. Sometimes you play the game by the rules and you do everything you are supposed to do. Occasionally, you do not, and on those occasions you might not get that promotion, so, definitely playing the game leads to career advancement. People play the game to advance their careers. Generally speaking, playing the game can affect career advancement both positively and negatively. If you can figure out how to get through the red tape, how to jump through the hoops, you are going to have some pretty good practice for getting out there in the world and accomplishing something. I find that the more I grow, the broader my horizons, and the more I see different opportunities. I learn how I can gain from my experiences.”

“In every environment, there are some rules that you have to follow, respect, or observe. Unfortunately in most places, you might do the most perfect job, but if you do not know how to play the game, you may not advance. If you are not willing to play the game, you are not going anywhere. There are times when you just have to grin and bear it. You do whatever it takes to advance your career, not literally, but figuratively speaking. In terms of my personal preference, I would like to think that I can get ahead based on my experience, my performance, my work ethic, what I can contribute to an organization without playing the game. I do not like to tell people that I believe playing the game affects career advancement, but everyone has to be able to play the game in order to be successful, and that does not mean necessarily in a negative way. When you have tough bosses who require mounds of work, you just do it because you have to if you want to advance. Some people refuse to play the game at all and usually those people are not successful.”

“You have to know how get all of the t’s crossed and the i’s dotted. You have to take the right courses and be in the right places all in the right timeframe. Overriding people or trying to get to one place and playing in a negative way, will not get you to where you want to go. You must also get your professors behind you. You must know their expectations and what they want you to learn. You also need to know which faculty members are in your back pocket and which students owe you a favor. You just have to negotiate your way one way or another and learn the ropes in order to get in, through, and out.”

“It is just as simple as that. If you are not wily and savvy about the bureaucratic red tape and you do not know how to finesse people who need to be finessed, you are not going to get anywhere in any field. If you cannot control yourself or conduct yourself in a professional manner, then there is absolutely no way you are going to advance in your career. Also, the choice

of people with whom you associate is all part of playing the game. You have to be very careful to choose people who are going to be your sponsors and mentors and help you get the next job, or be your references and say things about you that might encourage a potential employer to employ you.”

“When a professor who has observed you and knows how you have navigated the program, they may point you in the direction of scholarships or see a career opportunity for you. Faculty can open opportunities for career advancement. There is no other way about it. You have to develop relationships with your professors; you have to conduct yourself to be seen as being proficient; you have to bring professionalism to every single thing you do. The more you function in that way, the more you will advance in your career. The sad thing is, at the end of the day, those unspoken rules are going to affect you if you are not savvy. You will look at where you are and ask, ‘How did I get this opportunity?’ People do not talk about how things really work, but it will affect your career.”

“It all has to do with whom you know and how you follow the rules, whether you play by the rules, whether you try to get away with the rules, or whether you think you are an exception to the rule. This determines whether or not you move forward in your life and career goals. For example, I always thought that if I had an emergency or I was busy serving the needs of the kids in special education, I could miss meetings with the superintendent or my direct supervisor. That did not last long because, on a couple of occasions, I was told that I need to get my priorities straight. Before that, I thought my priorities were right because I wanted the best for my kids and the students we served. They thought my priority should have been sitting in a room listening to them talk about policies and procedures that had nothing to do with my area. I was clearly not playing the game. Because I messed up and had a different set of rules to playing the game, I was

straightened out. Those two instances may have hurt me in my career, but I was going to retire anyway. If had wanted to go even further in my career, they might not have promoted me because I did not know how to play the game.”

“Since my career is already in motion, I have years of experience and contacts already. So, potentially, as a graduate student, I could do just fine in my career without playing the university game. However, it sure is a lot easier to play the game, meet the right people, and make the right relationships, even if it does not impact me on a daily basis. It is still nice to have resources and trust, because you never know who is going to talk to whom about their graduate students. You just never know. I do not mean that I am unique, but I just have a different circumstance. I am not a typical, cut and dry graduate student.”

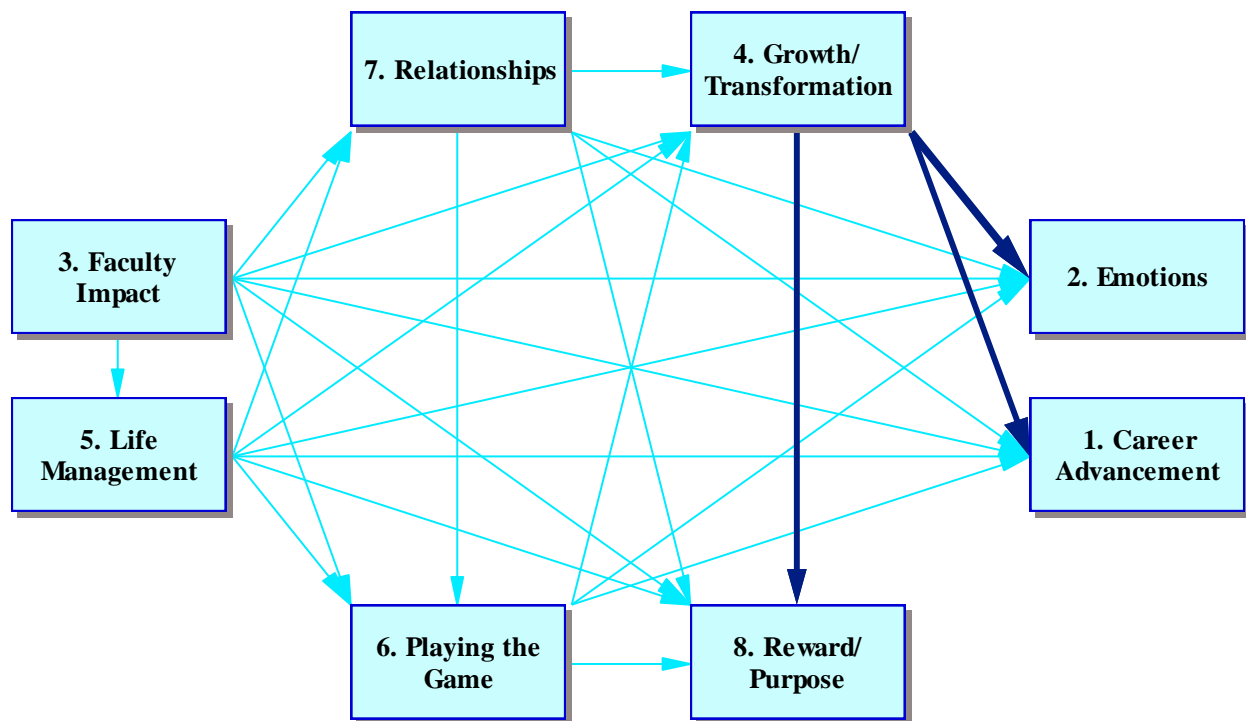
“I see playing the game as understanding the details of the higher education process. There are so many deadlines, conditions, and opportunities to make a mistake and miss something crucial. You really have to be cool about it and let it go or else it will drive you crazy. The extent to which you can navigate the minefields and remain successful playing the game will determine your ability to advance your career. In my program, great jobs are a natural result of completing the program. It is a given. Finish and you will be rewarded. The big caveat is that you have to finish. In order to finish you have to be successful playing the game.”

“Playing the game is a matter of getting through the process to the doctoral degree in the political sense. The hurdles and meeting deadlines are skills we learn by going through this graduate school process. If I can juggle the different components, I will be able to finish my degree and hopefully get the career that I want. For example, if submitting papers to journals is a required part of playing the game in the graduate experience and you do not write these papers,

you fail that part and you cannot succeed in your career. Not playing the game can be a big obstacle. If you piss off the wrong people, you are not going to accomplish your goals.”

“You better learn to play the game and build a social network if you want to advance in your career. Whether it is getting through the process, analyzing the politics, or paying attention to the power structures, you have to follow the rules in order to be effective. You must play the right cards, make enough phone calls, and watch your back with a political eye. The better able you are to assess the situation, and the better able you are to manipulate the circumstances, the better you are in your career.”

**Figure 4.5. Systems Influenced Diagram – *Growth/Transformation Influences...***



**Reward/Purpose**  
**Emotions**  
**Career Advancement**

### **Growth/Transformation Influences Reward/Purpose**

“The more I grow, transform, and reach for my internal goals, the more focused I get to my guiding purpose and the closer I am to achieving my ultimate reward. Day by day I see the light at the end of the tunnel more clearly. I would hate to think that I would go all the way through this program without learning anything and still get the degree. That is a scary thought. In my case anyway, I know that I have already learned a lot. By the time I get the reward, I will have learned even more.”

“The more that grow, the broader my horizons become, and the more I see different purposes I never considered. I ponder new ways I can use my experiences to make a difference in the education of minorities. This is a significant reward, an intellectual reward, and it helps to further define where I am headed. If I do not grow and transform to the extent that I feel like I should, then I am not rewarded. You are either growing or you are not reaching your goals.”

“As you keep growing, you encounter new experiences that lead to more growth and learning opportunities. When you reflect upon your experiences you can actually see yourself growing. You gain pride and satisfaction which leads to more growth. This trend continues and produces other rewards. So, I think there is a continuous loop. When I talk to Ph.D. students in different programs I find that they are not receiving the growth or training I receive in my program. So, I see this program as its own reward.”

“Through graduate school I have changed; I have become bigger and better. The books I have read, the papers I have written, and the research I have done fuels me with stronger skills to keep moving towards my Ph.D.. Instead of floundering through my studies wondering why I am still here pursuing my degree I think, ‘What I am doing? That is right; I am working towards being a better scholar and a better scientist.’ I keep that Ph.D. right ahead of me; I know my priorities. My purpose is more well-defined and I have developed a deep sense of self-

satisfaction. For me, growth is very important. If I am not growing, then I am not getting my reward.”

“If you are growing and learning, then you are achieving your purpose, and you will get rewards. One example was when I took statistics. I had not taken a math class since 1978 until I took statistics. I did not need a math class for my masters. I did not think I was going to do well at all. In the end I got a ‘B’. Just being in my statistics study group was a reward for me. The learning gave me increased confidence and new knowledge that I could be a solid researcher.”

“If all you want to do is make money, then you just have to meet the requirements A, B, C, and D. When you are done, you can go into some field where you can get that outcome. You may not grow as much as if you decided that your purpose was to change lives. My purpose is to touch the lives of those around me; that is going to affect my growth experience. I find greater reward from knowing my inner self and maybe sacrificing money I could earn so that I can help others. The essence of obtaining a Ph.D. is a reward that is not tangible. This is not Goldman Sachs where someone is going to hand you a ten ‘jillion’ dollar bonus for revving up the economy and you can pat yourself on the back for a job well done. Yes, you have to recognize that there are pecuniary rewards. But who you are as a person and who you aspire to be will affect what you find rewarding.”

“Rewards come only after you perform, after you demonstrate your ability. It is the culmination of a journey towards greater maturity, personal growth, and finding your destiny. As you grow, the reward will appear to be worth the effort. For example, each obstacle you overcome makes the purpose of working toward the award even more important. My purpose is way beyond a Ph.D.. Growth and transformation is like dessert. Knowing what you want out of



life will direct you in how you grow and transform toward that goal. The end is the purpose, the reward of the degree, and learning is its own reward.”

#### **Growth/Transformation Influences Emotions**

“When I am growing, it positively affects my emotional state. As I grow, I become better at what I do; I feel satisfied with my life. Who I am exudes through me because I become more self-confident and more self-assured, and more well-rounded. The fact that I am enjoying myself so much in this graduate program makes it much easier. I am pretty much a happy camper most of the time. As I grow stronger, I also learn to be more aware of my emotions. I am a very emotional person. I take things seriously, but I am able to manage my emotions better now.”

“If I get a bad grade, I feel bad; I feel like I am not growing. So if I am not doing well in a class, it will bring me down and it will affect how I feel about my graduate experience. I begin to feel depressed and disappointed in myself. The growth I experience in graduate school reduces the stress, anxiety, and fear I feel. As I grow, even though I am tired and stressed, the transformation I experience makes up for the negative emotions. When coursework feels like busy work, I just go through the motions; as a result, I do not feel good. I can be sad and depressed, but I still complete my work, leave my troubles at home, and try to do a good job. When I achieve, I am happy. When I grow as a person, I am fulfilled. When I am fulfilled, positive emotions and positive energy emanate from within me. I am a better person for myself and for those around me.”

“Just being in the United States drives my emotions most of the time. For example, if feedback from students is insulting, a positive comment from one of my professors can leave me feeling uplifted. As you grow as a person, you learn to keep, especially the negative emotions, from influencing your ability to achieve. When you are at a point in your life where you are in

transformation, your emotions may get a little crazy, but as you grow, you learn how to calm down a bit.”

“Learning is transformative. Growing and expanding my mind is gratifying for me. So if, in the end, I feel like I have advanced or moved forward in some way, that makes me very happy. If I am stagnating, then I start to beat myself up. I ask myself, ‘Why are you being such a lazy bum?’ Acquiring new knowledge about issues and ideas I need to know makes me feel more secure, at ease, and happy. Therefore, I feel more fulfilled as a person. Internally, I feel like I am a better person. I can use my knowledge to help others. As you grow, there is a feeling of joy and happiness, so I do think it affects your emotions. Whenever you are growing and doing things that are transformative, it influences your emotional state, positively and negatively. There is some pain with growth. It is never easy to give birth to a Ph.D..”

“When I started out in graduate school, I thought that I was a pretty non-emotional, bureaucratic business-like person. Over time, I realized that when I learn new things, I became excited, but when I have difficulty learning a concept, I become sad or disillusioned. As I have become a better researcher, my confidence has steadied my emotions. Part of growing is dealing with emotions. Having been a high school teacher and dealing with teenagers throughout my career, their emotions are on display 24-7. In talking to them you are able to help them work through their emotions and get them to deal with their emotions. What you realize when you go back to graduate school is that you face the same quantity of emotions, sometimes even more. You also have to mature, grow as a person, to handle the experience and to appreciate the opportunities that are coming your way.”

“As you grow, you overcome hurdles that help you deal more effectively with experiences in the future. You learn how to say, ‘This too shall pass’ and it helps you move

along. The more you grow as an individual, the better you are able to handle and assess those emotions. You are also better able to see how your emotions can guide you towards other positive things in life. The way you perceive your growth and the pace you expect results, will result in emotions. You may be happy or totally sad. At the same time, the emotions you experience throughout graduate school may, although not directly, impact your growth and transformation.”

#### **Growth/Transformation Influences Career Advancement**

“Without growth and transformation, you are not going to advance. The skills I am gathering right now will make me much more qualified once I leave here. The more you learn, the more you grow, the higher you are transformed. Your growth influences your ability to get a better job, although I am not convinced in all cases. In theory, as I grow I become more qualified to reach the upper tier of management. As leaders we are expected to continue to grow throughout our career.”

“You have to grow through the experience and then grow through that growth. Learning to manage your money and scheduling your time will have a big impact on how you advance in your career. The inverse of that statement is also true. If you do not learn how to manage your money and schedule your time, you will not move on in your career. As you learn, you feel more confident in doing things that maybe you did not know how to do before or you were not really sure about until you gained that knowledge. You became the expert or authority in areas required for your position, which leads to career advancement. That will, in turn, open more doors in terms of career opportunities.”

“The further I go along, the more I learn. This helps me whittle down where I want to be in the future and also helps me decide what I want and do not want. This will help me stay

focused and keep me from being distracted by things that I do not necessarily want for my career. The more confident you become with yourself, the stronger you feel. The higher you climb because you can handle what comes up. The next position you are assigned is a consequence of your growth. If you are growing, if you are improving, if you can adjust yourself to a different situation or environment, you will improve in all aspects of your life. Growth can be receiving a Ph.D.. Then, magically, something good will come.”

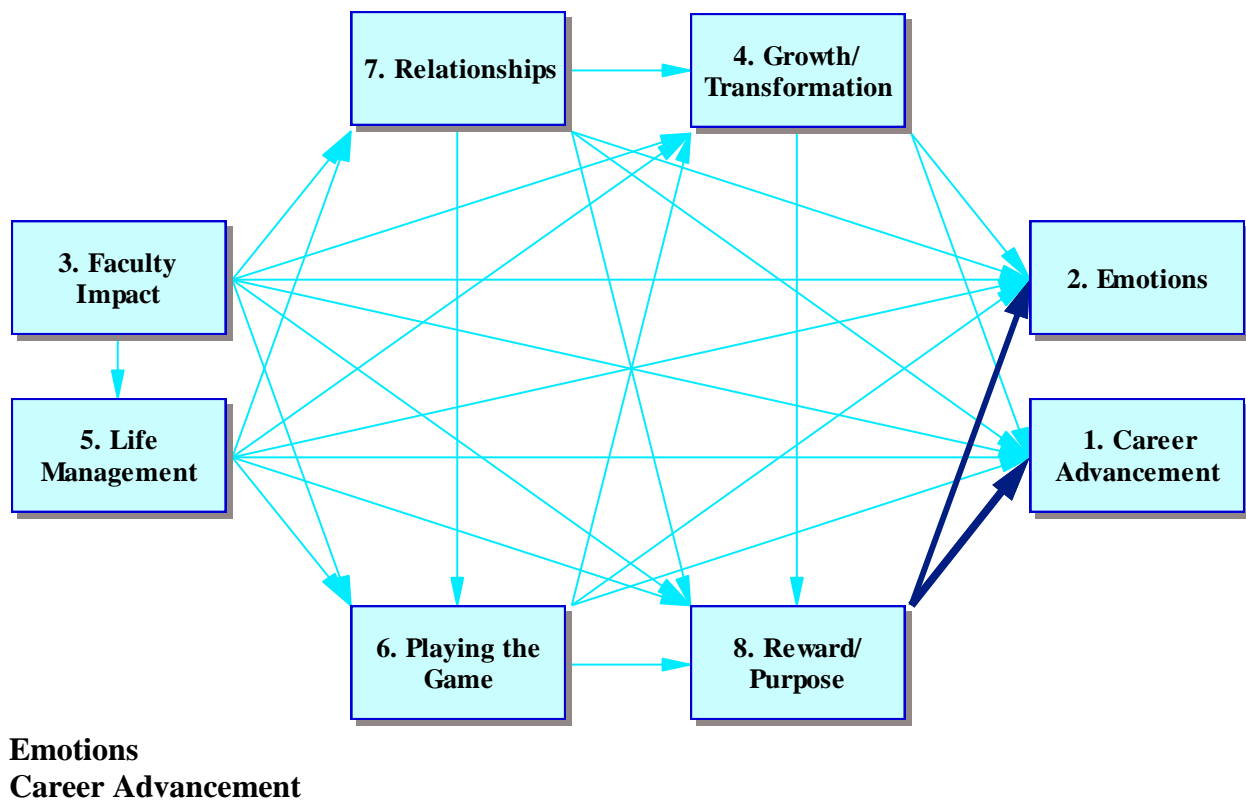
“The more papers you write and the more you research, the more you learn and the more it will impact your career. Going through the process connects me with a better understanding of myself, my personality traits, my work habits so that I better understand the characteristics I would like in my career. In this way, I can open more doors when I graduate, apply this knowledge to my job, and open more doors as a professional. If you are the same person afterward as when you started your Ph.D. program, those three letters are not going to get you further in your career. If I did not think I would grow or advance, why would I do this? Knowing how much I am growing and the impact it will make on my future makes me do a better job. It drives me to study harder and grow more. Besides the skills I develop will open more doors when I graduate.”

“Like they used to say on those Saturday morning cartoons, the more you know the further you go; that is how I feel. GPA matters in school, but folks often misuse it; they think that grades indicate intelligence. Immeasurable quantities cannot be clearly defined in a quantitative manner, yet few people trust qualitative research. So, there is a balance between measurement and the reality of experience that will help me grow as I further my career. When I can see where I am headed and the career possibilities I can obtain it triggers a desire within me to grow more.”

“As I grow, my life goals have reconfigured, or rather, redefined themselves. The more I grow, the more I learn, the more I advance professionally. This summer I plan to take a non-profit management class, since I am on the board of a non-profit. I believe this will have a direct affect on what I can contribute to my community. The opportunities for growth and learning can affect my career advancement either by the decisions I make or the path I take. If your growth is related to the social domain, then that will affect how you advance. There are a lot of ways we can grow and all of those will be related to your advancement. What I have learned in my graduate experience has made me a better administrator, a more skilled technologist, a more committed researcher, and more astute consultant. When I came to the United States, I transitioned from a practitioner to a student in academia and then to scholar or researcher. From that transformation I learned a lot that will probably contribute to my career advancement.”

“If I continue learning at the pace I am learning, I will meet my goals in the timeframe I want. The level of growth and the amount that I transform will ultimately impact what I do in my career. If I stagnate, like I did in my last job, to the point where I did not feel I was growing any more, I need to move on. That is why I came back to school. Besides, I may open up career pathways that may not have been otherwise available and I never considered. When you grow and transform, you become more cognizant of the world and clearer about the opportunities that are available. You have a better chance of knowing exactly where you are going and how you will get there. Because of this program, I am seeing everything as an administrator now. That has been a big transformation, because I am looking at everything through a different lens now. The skills I am gathering right now will make me much more qualified once I leave here.”

Figure 4.6. Systems Influenced Diagram – *Reward/Purpose Influences...*



#### Reward/Purpose Influences Emotions

“Once I obtain this degree, I cannot even explain or comprehend what I will feel like, or how I will respond. I will probably experience exhausted joy. Having a good job after completing this will make me overcome with emotion. We are all motivated by tangible and intangible rewards. When we receive those in response to good performance or a job well done, that will affect our emotions in a positive way. The opposite is true too. If we feel we are being unjustly punished or being held accountable for something we did not do, then that will affect our emotions in a negative way. So, when we have a clear purpose in our life and we feel that we are moving toward that goal, this can affect our emotions, our motivation, and our enthusiasm. We tend not to dwell upon the stressful situations when we have a clear purpose and know that

we are moving toward that goal. The intrinsic value, the pleasure and achievement of serving others, allows me to impact others in a purposeful way and that makes me happy.”

“Well, just the fact that you are successful in the program, you feel positive emotions. It is a loop. When you are successful, you feel more confidence, and then you try other things. That impacts how you feel about the program and the reward you obtain. This leads to positive emotions and also the career you want. Many people seek meaning in their life and work on this consistently as they move closer to their Ph.D.. It is about keeping the goal in sight.”

“When you decide to come to graduate school for whatever reason, you are agreeing to subject yourself to all types of emotional experiences. There have been mad moments and those that were infuriating. Even so, it is my passion that continues to drive me toward the finish line. The happiness I get from teaching and the frustration I get from teaching actually comes from my purpose in doing my degree and being in academia. My commitment to succeed determines what I experience and feel rather than the other way around.”

“Despite the turmoil I experienced with the group projects, I felt better in the end. Keeping in mind my purpose helps me to keep the stress, anxiety and fear manageable. Going into academia is my purpose and steps in that direction influences how I feel about being in this program. I try harder because of the way it makes me feel. If you define your purpose and your goals, then as you get closer, it makes you happier, satisfied, and driven to succeed. That internal validation that you get from the reward is an emotional experience. When I wanted to get a scholarship or a fellowship and it did not come through, I became frustrated and started to wonder, ‘Do I really look like a dog around here? I have a good record. What do these darn people want? I have told you I need money to go to school. What do you want me to do, beg for it?’ You just have to manage your emotions.”

“When you feel you are rewarded in a good way, that boosts your ego and gives you a positive emotional feeling. For example, I did a paper on a foreign university system. My professor liked the paper. He commented on what I wrote and told me that I took a very complex issue and wrote a great paper. There is a sense of pride and a good payoff for all of the work. It is rewarding when you do well on a paper and you move closer to that Ph.D.. That makes me happy. Most people are underappreciated, which leads to a lack of commitment, but when people are appreciated, they tend to work harder and overcome any hurdles. One of my classmates explained it well. She said, ‘You know, sometimes you just have to put on your big girl panties, get over it, and keep moving.’ What she meant by ‘big girl panties’ was your emotional intelligence.”

“My life can get out of control and my emotions can get out of control, but my purpose is my anchor. When something gets out of control, I just force myself to focus on what I am doing here. I am getting my Ph.D. so I can teach. When I am frustrated, I blow off steam and get over it. Some things have really upset me, or offended me, including lots of gossip in our department and even gossip about me. People said things that were negative and false. It is easy to get offended and confront somebody, but I figured that I would just stir up more trouble. I got over it. There is always new gossip. I just blow it off. I feel bad for celebrities with the rumors people tell and the invasion of their privacy. It must be really awful to have the whole nation talking about you. I only have twenty people talking about me and I go nuts. When it is not true, you want to shout from the rooftops, ‘Why would you even say something like that?’”

“When I am done, I will think, ‘Heck yeah!’ When I am working toward a goal, even if I do not make the goal, but I take steps, I feel good. Particularly when you earn a scholarship, present at a conference, publish a paper, or are asked to work with a researcher, that is a big



reward. The purpose that drove me to pursue this degree is that the doctorate would open up doors to me professionally and set an example for my children. I am sure I will have good memories afterwards.”

#### **Reward/Purpose Influences Career Advancement**

“Besides the idealism of learning and growing, the reward in the real world is to get a job. The actual reward allows you to advance in your career rather than the other way around. If you have goals and feel a certain way about what and where you want your life to go, your career can fulfill that desire. I have several purposes for graduate school; one of them is definitely furthering my career. So, my purpose to learn and grow will allow me to get the reward, which is the Ph.D.. This, in turn, will directly impact my career.”

“If you find meaning in it, then you will go further. One of the things that eventually drew me into this program and solidified my purpose in graduate school was my desire to make a difference in community college education. That desire is driving my career advancement. I would say your purpose influences your career advancement. If your reward is to help others and to feel satisfied in your accomplishments, and if what you do is constructive, it will have an influence on society.”

“Taking Ph.D. courses in the graduate school is the best reward. I do not think you find your purpose or advance in your career unless you are getting something out of it either spiritually or emotionally. Sometimes I do not feel like I have a purpose, but I do. If the purpose for attending school is intrinsic, then you will see that through the progression of your studies. If it is extrinsic, and you will seek to get your dissertation rubber stamped so that you can graduate.”

“I want to effect change in higher education. To do so, I need to be in a position to make decisions that will have a significant impact. To get to that position, I must to develop my skill-set and earn a doctorate. So, I started with a goal to achieve greater knowledge which led to doctoral studies. Achieving my Ph.D. will help me get to a position I need to be in to realize that goal. If you just show up to work every day, you are not going to move forward. You need a higher purpose. There has to be a reason, something you are trying to accomplish, something you want to change or make something better to make a difference.”

“Getting to a certain spot in your career drives your purpose, but I think your purpose has to kick in and you need to know where you want to go. Your purpose drives down a specific path. You have to know what you want to get out of your career. Reward is the money you make in the end. If your reward is something less tangible, then you will have a different career path. You have to know your goal and what you want to get out of this. Just the fact that you entered a Ph.D. program, as opposed to getting a J.D. or staying with a masters, you will have tradeoffs.”

“When I was a teacher and I was interested in advancing my career, my purpose was to know how the school functioned. I wanted to know more than what was happening in my classroom. When there was a crisis, I always wanted to be around the principal to see how they handled the event and the coordination of everything. The principal was grateful because I was another helping hand in the crisis. Helping and knowing that the principal could count on me was rewarding and that helped me to understand that I needed to do beyond the classroom. What drives me through this whole process and my purpose in life is to be a great teacher and that has always been the driving force.”

“I am more internally driven. If I wanted to make money, I would have gone into a different field, but I wanted to do interesting work. This is my internal motivation, my drive to

complete my Ph.D., and my goal to have a career that has meaning. When you find a purpose for your life, it translates into, hopefully, a meaningful career or a meaningful place of work. It seems that the reward and purpose is how you feel about the outcomes of your graduate experience. To me, if I feel good about my experience, even if I have not discovered my career yet, I am going to feel good about what I have done, which will help me advance my career. For example, if I am given a TA-ship or scholarship in my department, that would advance my career. My reward will be to get my degree and getting my degree will allow for career advancement. If your reward is to help people and if what you do is constructive, then your career goal can help lead you to the place you are headed in your life.”

“Career advancement is a perk. The reward is not just getting the Ph.D., it is to grow professionally, become a better scientist, and be a better thinker. As long as I have my eye on the reward and purpose for what I am doing, I will be driven to follow through with graduate school. Then I am confident that my career will move forward. When you feel that your life has a purpose and when you are encouraged or rewarded along the way, you are able to see how your graduate degree will lead to a successful career. There are many different kinds of personal awards or career awards. They are not necessarily monetary awards. They could be intrinsic or extrinsic rewards. However, I think that when you have a goal like finishing your graduate degree, that reward in and of itself leads itself to better outcomes or positive outcomes with your career.”

[illegible]

## Emotions Influence Career Advancement

“Some people do not hide their emotions well. I saw one situation where a girl went off on a professor. That pretty much ruined her career here. So, I think the timing has to be right. How you approach the professor, particularly if you are in the wrong mood, in the wrong situation, it could be detrimental. Emotions pretty much drive everything. How I feel, my

confidence level, and how I wake up in the morning, let alone career advancement, is driven by emotions. If you get emotionally involved in this program and work full-time, then it can hurt your career, but if you are not, then I guess it does not make much of a difference.”

“If you have negative emotions throughout the whole graduate experience, you will not realize the career advancement you desire. There is stress, anxiety, and fear in almost anything you do. If you do not deal with it well, your chance of advancing in most professions is limited. If you are stressed, fearful, or anxious, you will not do the things you need to do to obtain and succeed in your career and that includes finishing this degree. If you have not mastered the handling of your emotions, if you have not reached that level of emotional maturity, it will be very difficult for you to advance.”

“If you are always stressed out, then you may not get what you need to get. Also, if you are a whiny, difficult student to work with, you may not get very much respect from the professors you may want to work with in the future. If you are relaxed like me, you may also not get what you need to get because you are not aggressive and do not seem like you want it as much as someone else. So your career is going to be affected by that. It is important that I have the right personal attitude and positive commitment to my future. I need to feel good about myself and I must be emotionally stable in order to advance in my career. The more I believe in myself, the better I know I will do. If I have positive emotions and view the experience from a positive standpoint, I will get closer to career advancement. If I have a positive attitude and work well under pressure, I can live with the insanity. Another consequence is that my career will advance.”

“To function in an administrative position you have to have fairly good control of your emotions at all times. Emotions can be negative. You must be careful about how your emotions

are displayed. I believe the way you exhibit emotions can effect career advancement, depending on how people read you. For example, a friend of mine broke up with her boyfriend; she had a hard time with that. She just seemed like a real wreck. I do not know what her life was professionally, but I know she was struggling. I can imagine that if she was anything like the way I saw her, that could really be a recipe for disaster.”

“If you do not have control of your emotions and if you do not put experiences in context, I think you void your efforts. Someone’s emotions, whether they are healthy or unhealthy, will affect their ability to move ahead in personal relationships. Emotional health affects how we advance in every part of our life. We can be held back because of our inability to handle our emotions in an appropriate way. Emotions such as stress, anxiety, or fear can paralyze us and keep us from moving ahead or keep us from being successful or productive in our career.”

“If you are confident, if you are happy, that positively affects your career advancement. The more you believe in yourself, the better you will do. If you are always happy, you are ready to go, ready to interact with people, ready for new changes which are often found in career advancement. People like happy people. Unhappy people usually have no drive, no mood for new ventures. They become stagnant if not spiraling downward.”

“Stress and anxiety can actually cause you to do stupid things if you let them get the best of you. This might have a negative impact on your career advancement. If things become too difficult and you cannot deal emotionally with the stress of graduate school, then you probably will not finish or reach your career aspirations. If you are prone to being depressed or sad or crying, you are less likely to be put in management positions or in charge because you are seen as less stable. It seems like the less emotional you are, the further you get. There is a fine line. I

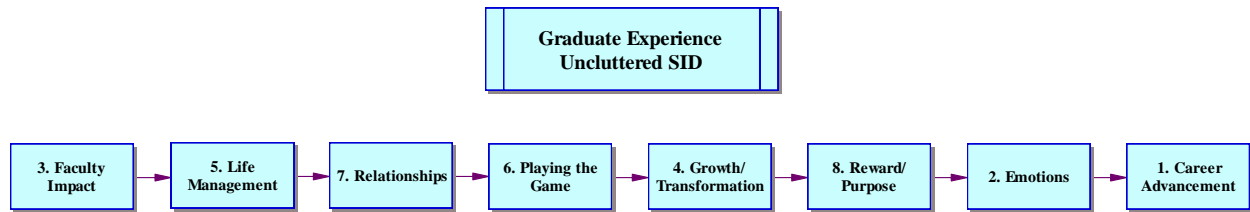
know plenty of women who are nice and have great jobs, but it seems like you need a level of sense of control to hold yourself together.”

“When I have negative emotions toward faculty, they take so much time from me. It affects my future because I spend so much time dealing with bad relationships with faculty. Faculty have a great deal of power. Since I do not have any power in this relationship, it is not fair. There are power issues and I am a slave! While I believe that to be true, I also know that I must be in the right emotional frame of mind and I must have the right emotions about graduate school in order to advance. If I am angry all the time or if I am bitter or sad I will not do well. But if I am looking for emotions that are positive and I am happy I will have more options.”

#### The Composite Interview Uncluttered SID

The cluttered Systems Influenced Diagram (SID) comprises all connections described by the interviewees and is thus saturated with relationships. While the saturated diagram is comprehensive, the cluttered SID has numerous relationships which can have multiple interpretations. For this system with eight affinities, the cluttered SID is complex with interlocking links. While it is desirable to for the SID to be comprehensive, clarity is another objective. A parsimonious system can minimize the multiple relationships. A way to reconcile the richness–parsimony dialectic is to produce a supplementary or secondary SID called the *Uncluttered* SID, one that has redundant links removed (McCoy, personal communication May 6, 2011). An example of an Uncluttered Composite SID is provided below.

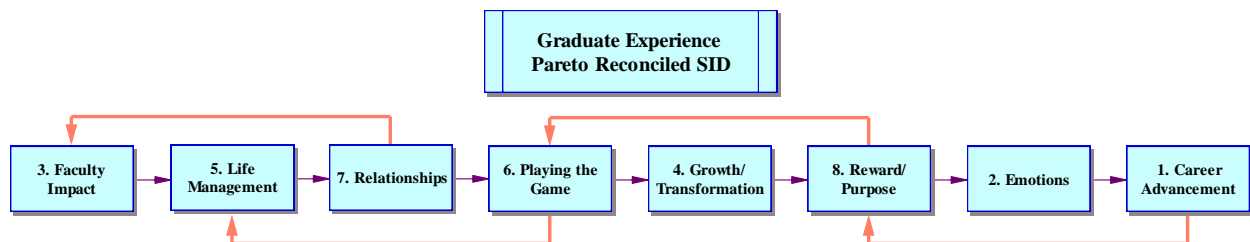
**Figure 4.8. Systems Influenced Diagram – *The Graduate Experience Uncluttered SID***



#### **Pareto Reconciled SID.**

Once the redundant links are removed, a Pareto Protocol is used to examine the system for conflicting relationships. Conflicts can occur when an affinity pair contains relationships in both directions with a frequency significant enough to include both in the system. The relationship with the lesser frequency is temporarily ignored in the IRD, but later it is reconciled in the uncluttered SID. In this step, the system is further investigated to determine if any conflicting relationships within the system are part of a feedback loop. If so, there are no changes so that the feedback loop is retained. Sometimes a link is added to the SID that was not directly described in the composite theoretical interviews.

**Figure 4.9. Systems Influenced Diagram – *The Graduate Experience Pareto Reconciled SID***





### **Career Advancement Influences... Reward/Purpose**

“I think career advancement drives reward and purpose. Your career allows you achieve your purpose. If you reach the goal you have set for yourself and you attain that goal, it certainly gives you a great deal of pride. The reward, in part, is your career advancement. Career advancement occurs once you have reached that point at the focal point in your graduate experience. That will lead you to your reward. I have found that as I advance, my degree is the key accomplishment in the end. I realize that I am doing what I set out to do and reap intrinsic rewards in addition to financial rewards. If I am able to use my Ph.D. to get into a new career, I would feel like I had been rewarded for all six years of this effort. I want to take it in steps as I advance to candidacy. That is a mini-part of career advancement that has an impact on my future and gives me the reward that helps me understand my purpose even more. It feeds those things. In terms of tangible rewards, as we advance in our careers, there might be monetary rewards involved also. There may be greater responsibilities, prestige and so forth that go with advancement in our career areas. You can feel reward and purpose when you are able to advance in your career.”

“Part of the reward for going to grad school is that someday I will make more money. However, in doing so, I lose money when I take out loans, so I will be paying some of this back someday. I will make more money, but that is not my ultimate goal. I really want to enjoy what I do, feel like I have a purpose in life, know that I am achieving a good, and realize that my life means something. If I advance in my career in a way that I want, I will feel validated, happy, and proud of my success. My degree will put me in a position to be recruited or guided towards a certain job situation and ultimately a career that presents the purpose or reward. In the end, I will have a sense of personal satisfaction in achieving my reward. When you climb up the hill and you reach the hilltop, you will get your reward and you will have reached your purpose.”

### **Reward/Purpose Influences... Playing the Game**

“My reward and purpose drive playing the game. Keeping my eye on where I want to be, my purpose for doing things, and not letting little things get in the way or bother me, helps me play the game better. I can deal with the constraints and the hurdles; I can let things go when I need to; I can concentrate on things that really need to be addressed because of my purpose for doing what I am doing. If I want to achieve the goals I set for myself, I have to play the game. I am playing the game when I take the required courses rather than the ones I want to take and I take them when they are offered instead of when I would really want to take them. Reward purpose is a driver because it is like the championship ring we are chasing. Without a purpose, you would not play the game voluntarily. Just like the book, A Purpose Driven Life, it is your purpose in life and your pursuit of that purpose that establishes the rules of the game you are playing.”

“Playing the game is a necessary evil. I wish I never ever had to play a game, I do not like to play games; I do not think that is positive for anybody to ever have to do, but you see people doing it and you think, ‘Darn, I am glad it is not me doing it right now.’ While you must have integrity, sometimes you have to be morally flexible. I do not have to play the game to achieve my goals, but occasionally what I am trying to achieve requires me to go a little bit further out of my way to talk to someone than I would like sometimes. My internal drive influences my external environment. My purpose cautions me as to how to play the game. I want to be a teacher. I want my Ph.D. I do not want to piss off my advisors. I do not want to get caught gossiping. I am not going to backstab anyone in the program because I do not want that to come back against me. I am not going to play dirty tricks and games. It may hold me back in some areas, but again, I want to be a teacher and get my Ph.D., so that is driving me as to how I play the game. If I remember why I am here and what I am doing, it is easier to play the game. I

started out getting my doctorate, in part, to achieve that reward. The number of hoops I jump through will be ultimately affected by my desire to achieve my goal.”

#### **Playing the Game Influences... Life Management**

“In terms of graduate school and my experience right now, I think that playing the game has helped me with life management. That goes back to my professor who was taking care of me financially and who helped me get into the program. You have to make time to go to dinners. You have to schedule the time to do what you have to do. If you are good at playing the game, you can make your life easier. When you connect with the right people, it can save you time and money. If you do not play the game properly, you may create difficulties for yourself that may affect deadlines. You may not be able to get into a class that you want because you irritated someone and they are not going to cut you any slack. Or with scholarships, if you do not play the game right, you may not be in line for scholarships nominations. Playing the game forces you to schedule better. You have less time. Faculty may make you stay in school longer and make you spend more money. To me everything impacts life management, because it is your life.”

“Sometimes you have to play the game. In order to accomplish assignments in graduate school you have to play the game no matter what. Your life is impacted. Sometimes I am afraid to say that life management comes second, but that just ends up how you have to arrange things. Playing the game impacts the way you manage your life. Learning how to handle red tape and understanding what it takes to get through the hoops is always going to help. You can take that experience and apply it to a lot of situations in your life. Playing the game also influences your frustration level as you jump through the hoops. In order to play the game and do it well, you have to designate the way you are going to spend your time, and your money. You have to dole out time, money, and other things in order to play the game correctly and that will affect how

much you have to dole out. Any ability you have to deal with bureaucracy and constraints will help you or affect your ability to manage your personal life. I think that my ability to play the game has affected my ability or my lack thereof to manage my time and the time I have with my family.”

“When I took my exam, I had to restructure my weekend and how I managed my life at home and how I managed my relationship with my husband. I had to tell him to go away. It was as if I did not have a relationship. In order to take my courses and do my research, I must figure out how to schedule these with the least disruption to my life while still having some semblance of a life outside of graduate school, maintain my friends, have a personal life, and still be a good student in graduate school. Playing the game takes a certain amount of time. You cannot be on an emotional rollercoaster when you play the game. There are times when you must be 100% into a given situation and there are times when you have to step back. Knowing what you have to do will help you manage your other responsibilities so you can do everything you need to do. In determining your priorities, you must manage your life, jump through hoops, and perform up to a certain standard. All of these are interrelated. You cannot go through life in isolation as if each action is independent. You cannot bake a chocolate chip cookie and not have eggs, flour, and sugar. It is just one big mixing bowl of life. You cannot cook the flour alone.”

“When I think of bureaucracy, as an international student, what comes to mind is the visa problem. You have to remain in school and take a certain number of credits. If you take a semester off, you have to change your visa. This affects your life at home, too, and your life in general. Not necessarily in a positive way, but playing the game is such an integral part of being a student that you have to find different ways, either direct or indirect, to deal with the written and unspoken rules and incorporate them into your operations as a graduate student. That aspect

of being a student is not going to go away, so it is just a matter of working with it and going along to get along. How you play the game and how involved you are will determine how you manage your life. If you are consumed with learning the game and playing it strategically on top of classes, work, and a family for example, that will definitely impact how you manage your life. Life outside of work and school can also suffer. Techniques employed while playing the game impact how you manage your life, your time, and everything else. If you do not play the game right, you cannot manage your life because you will find roadblocks. Life is the game; it is all about options.”

#### **Relationships Influences... Faculty Impact**

“Relationships impact how you work with and are perceived by faculty. Your relationships with professors will affect how much they help you. A girlfriend of mine, whom I dearly love, has been struggling, screwing up, and having a hard time in the program. When I hang out with her, the faculty approach me differently. So my relationship with her affects their perception of me, and also my relationship with her affects them. On the other hand, if I take my boyfriend to a party, he is so articulate and well-spoken and intelligent that because of my relationship with him, their perception of me is influenced because they see me in a positive light. If you have a good relationship with a faculty member, then chances that they impact your studies and your program are greater than a faculty member with whom you do not have a relationship or you had problems in the past. You tend to gravitate to the faculty members with whom you have good relationships in order to gain knowledge from them. If you have a really good relationship with a given faculty member, then the chances that they impact your studies and your program are greater than a faculty member with whom you do not have a relationship or you had problems in the past. You tend to gravitate to the faculty members with whom you

have good relationships in order to gain knowledge from them. Essentially, you get more done if you have good relationships with the faculty than if you do not.”

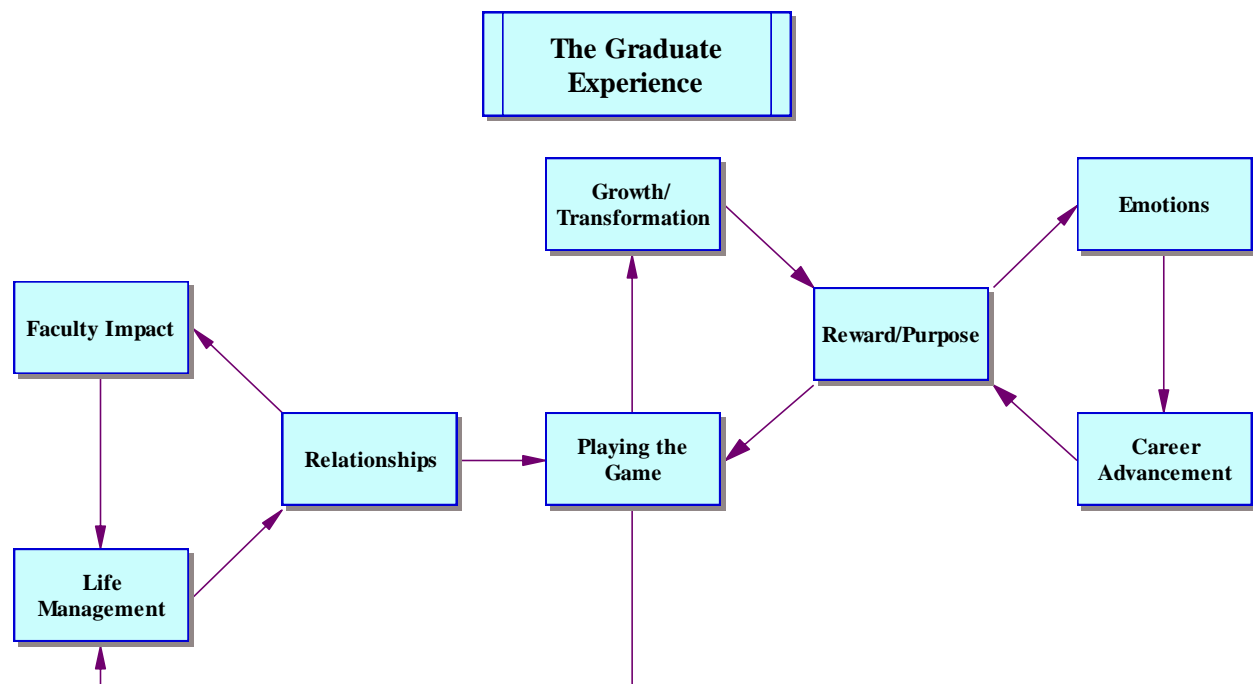
“I have cultivated an especially good relationship with a few faculty members. They have had a tremendous impact on me. If you have a good relationship with the faculty and they are concerned, caring, confident, they can do great things for you. I have a very cordial and congenial relationship with one of my professors and she, in turn, was very constructive in her feedback on the papers I submitted. My constructive criticism on her class was well received and regarded as compared to what I saw her do with some of the other students when they did not get along well. The interactions you have with your peers, the way that you participate in class discussions, the way you talk about the advising relationships with faculty; that could affect your faculty relationships. You have to ask yourself if you could be doing more or what other student are getting out of their advisor relationships that you are not. If you cultivate relationships, you will improve what you receive from faculty.”

“Faculty are even more supportive at this point than they have been through the whole program. I can now see that they want me to excel. Faculty also need to see that you can get along with various people and contacts. Without building a relationship with faculty, their impact would be arbitrary. There are some people going through this program who have not hooked up with faculty members. They have a committee and advisors, but they have not really worked to understand their interests. This is because they have not created a relationship with them. I have. My advisor and I set up weekly meetings to work on research. They sometimes advise me; sometimes they ask me to help them with research or projects or whatever. If faculty need something, like research or things that they feel that, in their position, they do not need to do at this point in their life, you need to be there. My advisor and I have given several conference

presentations together. He feels that he can count on our relationship. If he says he is going to be at the airport or he says he is going to pay for something, he does. If I say I am going to bring notebooks or handouts, I do. Relationships with faculty are not like those with your parents where it is unconditional. This is something that you have to work at to make it work. I have never been married, but that is what I think it would be like; you having to work at it. It is there, but you have to put in the time to see the fruits of your labor.”

The Composite Uncluttered SID generated from the graduate student interview data in this study is presented below.

**Figure 4.10. Systems Influenced Diagram – *The Graduate Experience Using Student Data in this Study***



## CHAPTER 5-CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*“You cannot climb a mountain  
if you will not risk a fall.”*

Rick Beneteau

### Overview

Graduate school can be an extraordinary experience enhanced by stimulating seminars, faculty-directed research opportunities, and breakthrough discoveries. However, graduate school can take many years and require considerable sacrifice such as family, income, health, work, self-confidence, and emotional stability. While a graduate degree can reap rewards and oftentimes career advancement, in some fields the attrition rate is fifty percent (Bell, 2010; Nettles & Millett, 2006). The Council of Graduate Schools Ph.D. Completion Project (2009) reports that even after ten years, the range of doctoral degree completion varied from 49 percent and 64 percent at the universities they surveyed. A 2010 report by the National Research Council states, “Over 50 percent of the students complete their degree in six years or less in the agricultural sciences and in engineering. In the social sciences 37 percent complete it in six years or less, which is the same percentage of humanities who complete by eight years” (p. 4). This means that in the humanities, 63 percent do not complete their doctorate or they complete their doctorate more than eight years. The uncertainty of graduate degree completion and the complexities of life during the prolonged time-to-degree period can play a part in a student’s motivation, persistence, and success in graduate school.

Despite the challenges, many opportunities await, not the least of which is boundless knowledge. Perched on the forefront of this expansive territory, graduate students witness a breathtaking view of the limitless tangible and intangible possibilities for his or her future.



Coupled with increased understanding in a specialized concentration within his or her discipline, graduate students also experience the excitement of intellectual inquiry and passionate quest into scholarly pursuits. These opportunities lure individuals to apply to and attend research institutions in order to extend their knowledge, achieve their personal goals, and/or advance their career. While the excitement of delving into a specialized field of study can result in personal reward attainment, managing academic and personal life throughout graduate school is often not a straightforward, clear pathway. In fact, some students never fully acclimate. Relationships with fellow students are sometimes difficult to develop and family issues can be challenging. Moreover, advisors are often vague; there is no single course of action. Some students do not manage well with uncertainty and the implicit rules of the game are often not clearly delineated. Thus, while graduate students are often aware that the benefits outweigh the costs, unexpected challenges arise and the realization that opportunities lie over the horizon provide the hope and inspiration to press forward.

Many factors lead to a student's drive and commitment to obtain a graduate degree. There is a strong correlation between educational attainment and income (Blanden & Gregg, 2004; Walpole, 2003). From an early age, many individuals set their sights on graduate school as an eventual goal. Some are motivated by parental influence and others by their own internal drive to reach the higher levels of scholarly pursuit and degree attainment. For whatever reasons, the thought process stimulating the desire to attend graduate school can percolate for decades. While some students do attend graduate school directly after their undergraduate education, for many, the road down life's highway of experience, learning, and school may have many twists and turns before the student embarks upon their graduate degree program. Emotion, perseverance, transformation, and commitment are all parts of this process. Life happens and

major hurdles or unexpected challenges can impede a student's progress or sometimes stop them completely. With a family, career, and established life, some students ask, throughout the many years of their program, whether this experience is worth the sacrifice.

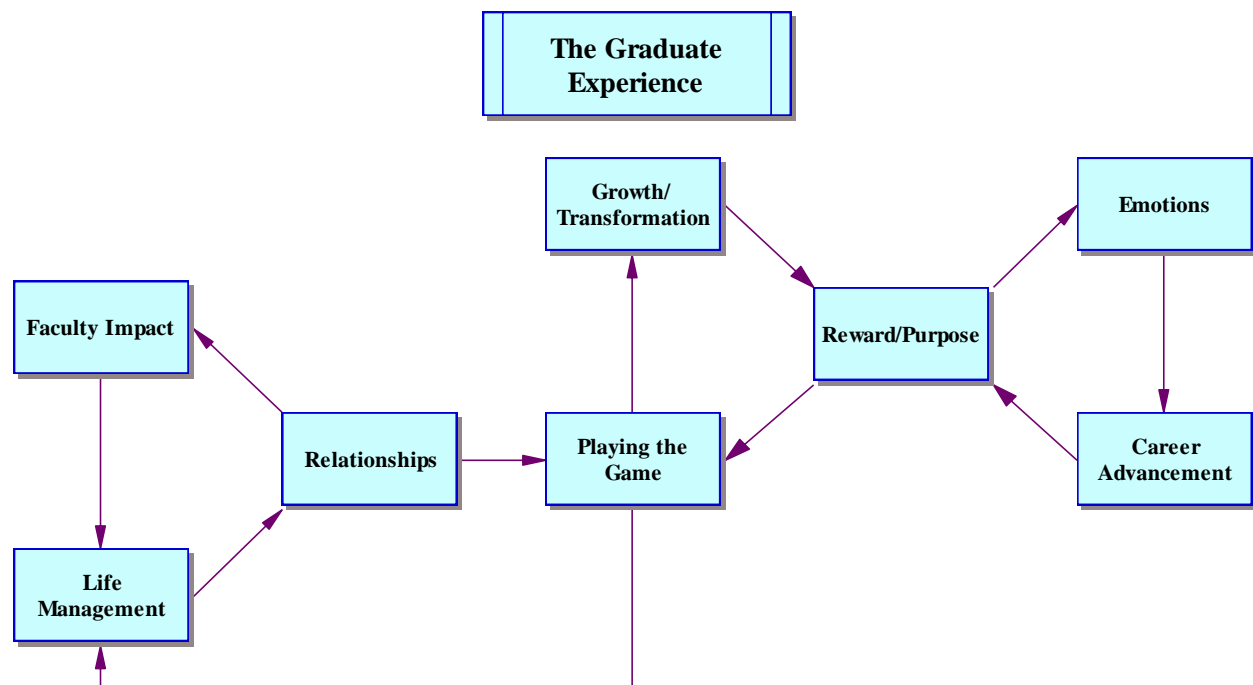
### Research Questions

1. What drivers influence the graduate student in moving through his or her graduate program?
2. What is the relationship between the student (emotion, relationship building, drive, growth/transformation, and commitment to career advancement) and external forces (faculty, advisors, family, fellow graduate students, and potential employers)?
3. How does the graduate experience model compare to other theoretical frames?
4. What might faculty and advisors do to support students in achieving their academic goals?

The first research question asks which drivers influence a graduate student moving through his or her academic program. Focus groups came to consensus on eight affinities that represented factors they perceived were the most salient during the graduate experience: Career Advancement, Emotion, Faculty Impact, Growth/Transformation, Life Management, Playing the Game, Relationships, and Reward/Purpose. The second research question asks about the relationship between the graduate student and external forces. This question is answered using the directional connections derived from the student data and represented by the system shown on the next page. The tabulations, Excel analysis, and quantitative methodology contained within Interactive Qualitative Analysis techniques produced the study's resulting composite system or System's Influenced Diagram (SID). This system's depiction of the graduate student experience was developed with assurance from numerical data and supplemented with the rich detail of the

interview data: the students' declarations of which element was described as influencing each subsequent element in the system. The validity of the SID development came directly from Interactive Qualitative Analysis theory as described in chapter three. The resulting SID is presented below.

**Figure 5.1. Systems Influenced Diagram – *The Graduate Experience Using Student Data in this Study***



***The Graduate Experience Composite System***

The third research question asks how the graduate experience compares to other theoretical frames. A discussion is presented comparing this model to two other models: Northcutt and McCoy's early model with a smaller sample of student interviews and Susan Gardner's Model of Doctoral Student Development.

Finally, the fourth research question attempts to better understand how the model derived from the data in this study can identify avenues to better support students in successfully

accomplishing their academic goals. This third question is answered by examining the Four Stage Systems-Based Model of Graduate Student Transformation. This concluding chapter offers an explanation of this model and describes how to understand the system in order to create policies, programs, and services to improve graduate student persistence. Finally, recommendations for administrators, faculty, and graduate students are proposed along with areas for further study.

### The System Influenced Diagram (SID)

The SID created from the interview data depicts a pathway from which a graduate student enters the university environment and transitions from stage to stage. At each stage, they ask questions, make critical decisions, and push forward or cycle back through the system. As graduate students grow and transform, they resolve life questions and build the bridges that allow them to move forward. There is a clear pattern presented in this system, along with progressive elements, feedback loops, inputs, and outcomes. However, it is important to remember that life is complex. No system will describe every nuance of life's questions and variances. Human life, particularly as it relates to awareness, contemplation, and behavior implies that one does not merely move from frame to frame in life's motion picture, but each individual uses their mental processes to scan prior events before moving on to new ones. Each interaction with a faculty member, fellow student, family, or friend will be incorporated into a new, transformed awareness as the student takes each step. Thus, the elements, Faculty, Life Management, and Relationships, at the beginning of the system and both Growth/Transformation and Emotion further down the system are inherent in each day or event, particularly while experiencing the elements, Playing the Game, Reward/Purpose, and ultimately, Career Advancement. Emotional growth stemming

from the adaptation to appropriate social behavior is implicit throughout the system. In fact, emotional intelligence appears to be critical in Faculty Impact, Relationships, Playing the Game, Growth/Transformation, and Emotions. For example, Life Management, as a graduate student progresses through the system, is not self-contained, but rather, in this model demonstrates the student's balance and stability in each stage as they move forward to new vistas.

This study is precisely about developing a formal methodology for analyzing a difficult and often elusive set of life experiences in graduate school. Graduate education, along with its commitment to passing the torch to the next generation of researchers and expanding upon the body of knowledge, ranks among the highest purposes a graduate research institution. This process engages the life work of faculty who commit themselves to deeply immersing themselves in a body of knowledge and both adds to that literature and shares that wisdom with their students and others both inside and outside of academia. Most faculty take their research and mentoring seriously. They are deeply invested in their own intellectual pursuits, but also see the potential in planting seeds in new researchers, many of them who will themselves become faculty. Thus, it is not surprising that faculty drive this system.

Faculty invest significant time through many years of study. They further hone their skills and knowledge through continuous enrichment, sacrifice, and emancipation. Faculty, like their 'disciples', defer career and financial gratification and often incur significant family, social, and monetary costs to witness how their colorful tile can combine with the knowledge mosaic to achieve a greater good. The highly quantifiable opportunity costs of research faculty, like those given up by their dedicated graduate student associates, bring them together in a common bond of sacrifice and emergence in the world of the academy. The glue that holds the university together is the highly trained and dedicated administrators and staff. Moreover, many others also

have a stake in the success of the institution. The purse strings of taxpayers, elected officials, organizations, and other funding entities are tied to perceived benefits and outcomes. Those stakeholders need to better understand the real costs and opportunities of graduate education both within the institution and for society as a whole. The cost of graduate student failure is, therefore, a real concern that can no longer escape the attention of the general public, particularly those directly concerned such as Boards of Trustees, alumni, and organizations who rely on the successful student transition from academic to community life. This study offers a way to understand what is happening and makes recommendations to university principals.

In order to conceptualize a framework for the graduate experience using the data from this study, a four-stage systems-based model is presented that fits with the four feedback loops in the system. From this model, problems associated with socialization, attrition, adaptation, transformation, and persistence, along with the achievement of an overall sense of purpose may be identified. Considering the dimensions of the student's experience and his or her progress, corrective measures may then be considered. There are clear areas where administrators and faculty can provide a positive environment and increased cultural understanding of the graduate school environment. These ideas will be further explored through the model proposed below.

#### Four Stage, Systems-Based Model of Graduate Student Transformation

***Stage I – Orientation and Socialization***

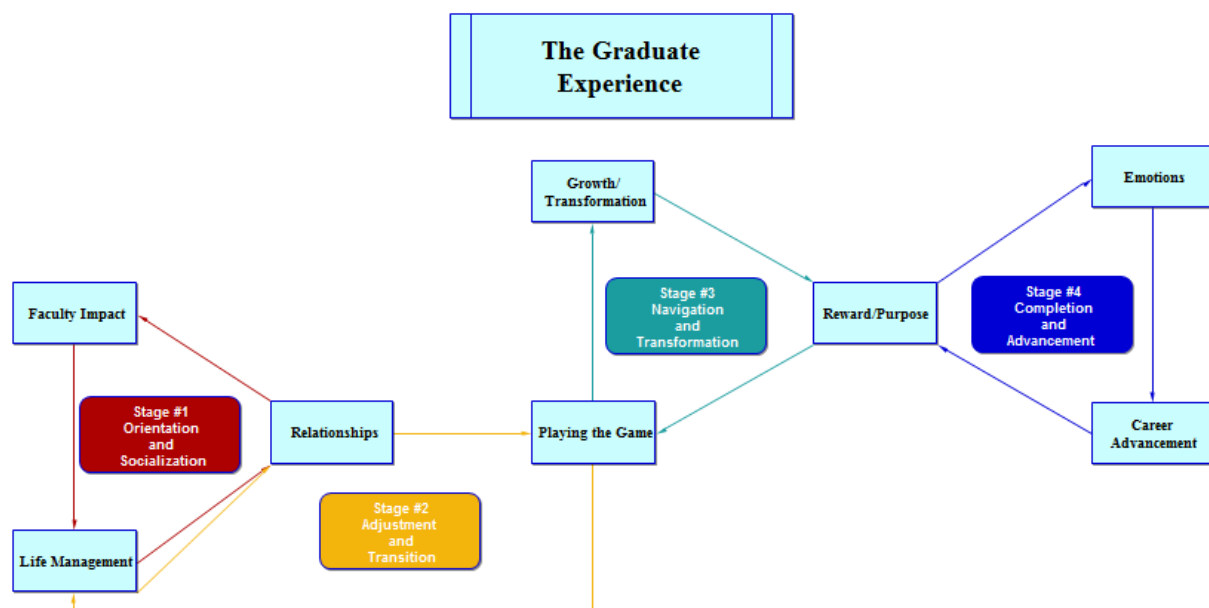
***Stage II – Adjustment and Transition***

***Stage III – Navigation and Transformation***

***Stage IV – Completion and Advancement***

The four stages of this model can be viewed as a single, dynamic system with drivers and outcomes. We can also zoom out and view the identified feedback loops individually. According to the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, a feedback loop is “The section of a control system that allows for feedback and self-correction and that adjusts its operation according to differences between the actual output and the desired output” (2009). In this system, student interview data produced this interconnected diagram which presents a dynamic model of outcomes and pivotal periods for self-correction. By zooming out, we can highlight the dynamics of these affinity relationships for further analysis and consider recommendations based upon the identified relationships presented.

**Figure 5.2. Systems Influenced Diagram of the Graduate Experience with the Four Stages**



The four stages fit neatly with the four feedback loops identified in this study. Each of these three-element loops identifies a stage in a graduate student’s decision making process and therefore, their transformation in becoming a graduate degree recipient. It also reflects a possible

moment in which the graduate student may drop out or step out of their program. The associated elements are listed with their stages below.

**Table 5.1. Stage by Stage Table with Associated Feedback Loops**

Stages	Title	Affinities	Feedback Loops
Stage #1	<i>Orientation and Socialization</i>	Faculty Impact – Life Management – Relationships	<pre> graph TD     FI[Faculty Impact] --&gt; LM[Life Management]     LM --&gt; R[Relationships]     R --&gt; FI           </pre>
Stage #2	<i>Adjustment and Transition</i>	Playing the Game – Life Management – Relationships	<pre> graph LR     LM[Life Management] --&gt; R[Relationships]     R --&gt; PG[Playing the Game]     PG --&gt; LM           </pre>
Stage #3	<i>Navigation and Transformation</i>	Playing the Game – Growth/Transformation – Reward/Purpose	<pre> graph TD     PG[Playing the Game] --&gt; GT[Growth/Transformation]     GT --&gt; RP[Reward/Purpose]     RP --&gt; PG           </pre>
Stage #4	<i>Completion and Advancement</i>	Reward/Purpose – Emotions – Career Advancement	<pre> graph TD     RP[Reward/Purpose] --&gt; E[Emotions]     E --&gt; CA[Career Advancement]     CA --&gt; RP           </pre>



Each of the affinities in this system was broken down into subaffinities, which were identified by the researcher through the process of coding the interviews. These subaffinities, presented in chapter 4, provided greater detail into the life of a graduate student. Through the insights, stories and experiences of the interviewees, a clearer picture emerges. A table of the affinities and subaffinities are provided below.

**Table 5.2. Table of Affinities and Subaffinities**

<b>Faculty Impact</b>	teacher, advisor, mentor, motivator/encourager, committee member, researcher, networker, accessible
<b>Life Management</b>	time management, academic deadlines/responsibilities, managing finances, home life, commuting, family, friends, relaxation, work
<b>Relationships</b>	close school friends, school acquaintances, faculty, cohort, networking, family, friends outside of school
<b>Playing the Game</b>	bureaucracy, knowing the rules, faculty approval, appearing to conform, choosing a committee, strategic relationships
<b>Growth and Transformation</b>	intellectual/academic growth, social growth, emotional growth, professional growth, practical experience
<b>Reward and Purpose</b>	pursuit of knowledge, family expectation, self-validation, achieving a dream
<b>Emotions</b>	stress, anxiety, frustration, fear, isolation, overwhelmed, happiness, excitement
<b>Career Advancement</b>	opening doors to career options, obtaining a credential, requirement for promotion, becoming a professor, serving the public

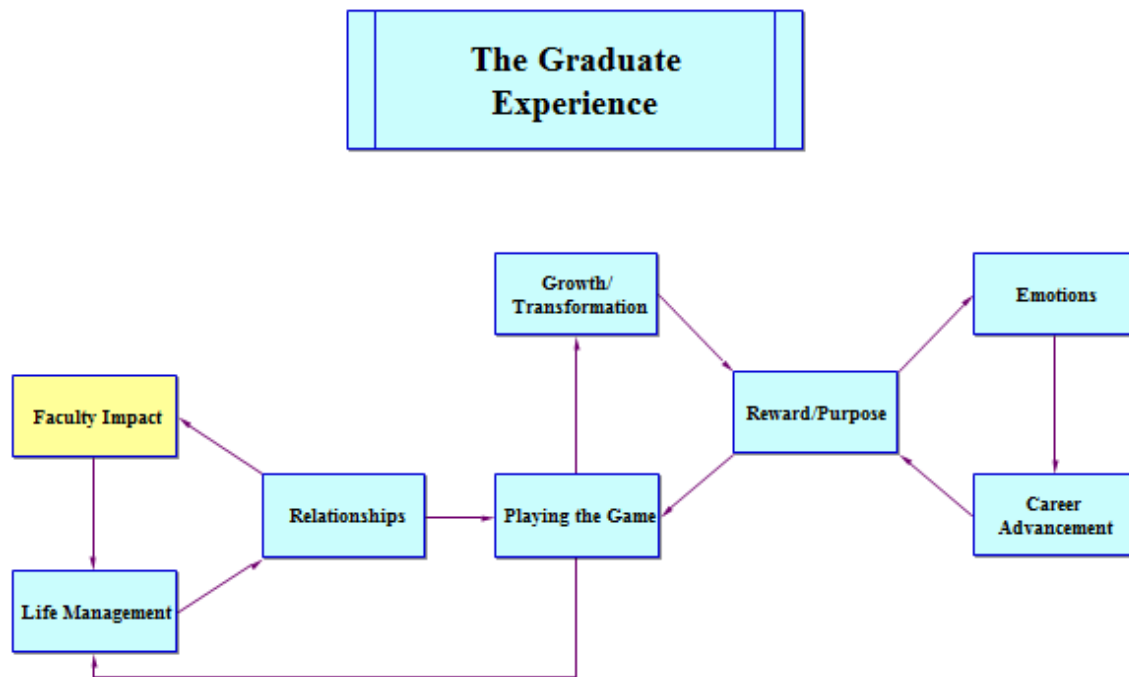
## The Graduate Experience Feedback Loop #1

### Faculty Impact – Life Management – Relationships

#### Faculty Impact

*Absolutely the most powerful factor in graduate school is faculty. Nothing is more important and nothing has more of an effect on your education. For me, the faculty here at the university are excellent. They are well prepared and they are good scholars. While they are demanding, they motivate students to give their best.” - Interviewee*

Figure 5.3. Systems Influenced Diagram of the Graduate Experience Highlighting Faculty Impact



The primary driver in this system is Faculty Impact. In the diagram, this affinity appears in the upper left hand corner of the system. As a driver, Faculty Impact is a significant factor in shaping, supporting, and guiding students through the entire journey. Student-identified faculty roles presented as sub-affinities in the axial coding are: teacher, advisor, mentor,

motivator/encourager, committee member, researcher, and networker. In these roles, faculty can be supportive, encouraging, compassionate, rigorous, controlling, self-centered, and domineering. Graduate students, because of their close relationship with faculty and need for approval to move ahead, must learn to work with the faculty no matter how they present themselves.

In their role as teachers, faculty serve as instructors, coaches, guides, and leaders in the classroom (Tinto, 1975). Students work with faculty through a socialization process within each of these roles and thus, faculty drive the entire system and are integral to every facet of graduate student life. In classes, faculty present material and facilitate discussions so that generated ideas enhance learning. Although some instruction is derived from books, journals, and handouts, faculty harness wisdom from class lectures, readings, and discussions so that ideas come to life. Students also learn their role as a researcher, thinker, and academician from faculty. Graduate students serve as understudies led by faculty who have many years of practice in understanding what needs to be accomplished, organizations to which they should be affiliated, people whom they should get to know, and research they may want to pursue. In the ideal situation, guided by faculty who are supportive and inspirational, graduate students flourish.

The flipside, though, is that poor guidance, instruction, and advising can impact a student. Sometimes the faculty member or advisor is unavailable or they assign workloads that negatively impact Life Management. According to one student, “Whenever the homework or reading assignment for a certain professor is killer, that puts a cramp in your life; you just have to read, read, read, read. That is what is great about him. He holds you accountable. He forces you to learn whether you want to or not. So, by that power, he changes what I can do with other pieces of my life.” This is one way the first affinity connection Faculty Impact drives Life Management.

Often, faculty provide guidance and advice that students need to navigate the graduate experience and move forward. Individually or in groups, advising generally occurs outside of the classroom. Faculty explain curriculum, course schedules, academic programs, and department channels to guide students towards their end goal. From the moment a student enters the program until long after they have left, this bond offers a lifeline whenever there is a snag along the way. Faculty advising on procedural requirements is also a key component. Scheduling comprehensive exams, planning internships or fellowships, and engaging in research apprenticeships are key elements that occur before the writing of a dissertation or thesis. The committee formulation, choice of dissertation topics, IRB approval, collection of data, writing of a proposal, and completing the dissertation or thesis are other tributaries where the advisor role is significant. “My advisor has never been negative. Even when I look for instances now, where I think, ‘Oh, one day, one day he is going to be negative,’ I have never seen it. The only time I thought my advisor ever said something negative was, ‘Well that was a different experience for you, was it not?’ In our relationship, we work together to ensure that they are not negative; it really helps to always stay positive.”

The student-mentor relationship is distinct from that of the advisor in that generally, students have one advisor in their department, but they may have a few mentors; one of them may be their advisor. In a research study of 9,036 students, 69 percent said they had mentors and, of those who identified mentors, 70 percent found them during their first year of study (Nettles & Millett, 2006). While this is encouraging, this also means that 31 percent did not have mentors, which appears to present a gap in students support through their program. Nettles and Millett also found that having a mentor indicated a shorter time to degree in some fields. The Council of Graduate Schools Ph.D. Completion Project data showed that, “Overall, 40% of the respondents

indicated that they wanted more time with their mentors and a similar percentage (39%) indicated that career/professional guidance would have helped improve their level of satisfaction with the mentor” (2009, p. 32). Mentors may be professional or academic, within the department or outside, supervisory or external to the graduate experience. Faculty mentors often meet with students more informally outside of the classroom. Mentors offer more than a navigation channel. They offer personal advice, suggestions, connections, and political insights. My mentor “forced me to examine fundamental assumptions about my approach to doing research, the way I approached graduate work, the way I formulated my ideas, and how I articulated them on papers I submitted. Another professor opened my mind to what it is to be a scientist and the philosophy of science; that was a lot of fun. I learned about unspoken assumptions that I did not realize about my thinking.” Interviewees explained that their mentors were also motivational leaders who infused students with energy and recharged their batteries. Students wanted to know they were headed in the right direction. The unofficial designation of ‘mentor’ carried with it a sense of respect. Students described empathetic faculty who provided them emotional and academic support. My mentor “taught me the definition of bureaucracy, the process, and the techniques. He shared information on the model of the dissertation.”

University faculty conduct research in areas of their passion, enthusiasm, and expertise in addition to their teaching duties. Many faculty prioritize research over teaching for many reasons including: the contribution of new ideas to the field, blending of research with intellectual inquiry, mentoring and supervising graduate student research, keeping up with current ideas generated in the field, and the expectations of senior faculty to produce work and bring esteem and notoriety to the department. In this way, researchers are specialists who cultivate and plant new growth in their fields to be harvested, but they also instill the value of research to their

students. Finally, university researchers share their passion with students so that they can leave graduate school as skilled researchers. As such, one of the key faculty roles is to show students how to become better researchers so that they can work on department grants and projects, but also initiate and fund their own original research. In this capacity, faculty may offer research opportunities and be asked to serve on the student's thesis or dissertation committee.

Research often leads to papers, posters, and roundtables at conferences, but can also result in publications. Faculty often guide the student-researcher by taking them to a conference or serving with them on a panel. By presenting at conferences and publishing scholarly work, faculty and students build an extensive network of colleagues and collaborators on various types of projects. Showing graduate students this process is critical, particularly when a student is not familiar with submitting and proposals or proper decorum at these types of meetings. Faculty support students who learn the ropes by watching how their mentors and advisors work with others. Faculty introductions and connections are often invaluable. Additionally, students benefit enormously by name and friendship association with other faculty. This can be particularly helpful at conferences, getting papers published, and identifying and securing jobs after graduate school.

Members of a graduate student's thesis or dissertation committee have a significant impact on the graduate experience. Since the thesis or dissertation is generally the capstone project, it is the last hurdle that must be overcome before graduating. The research and writing is overseen by a faculty committee who shepherd them through the process explaining how to navigate, what elements are required, and showing them how to obtain resources, samples, and guidelines to help them proceed. This part of the process is extraordinarily difficult for some students who are unfamiliar with format, guidelines, and even writing treatises in general. This

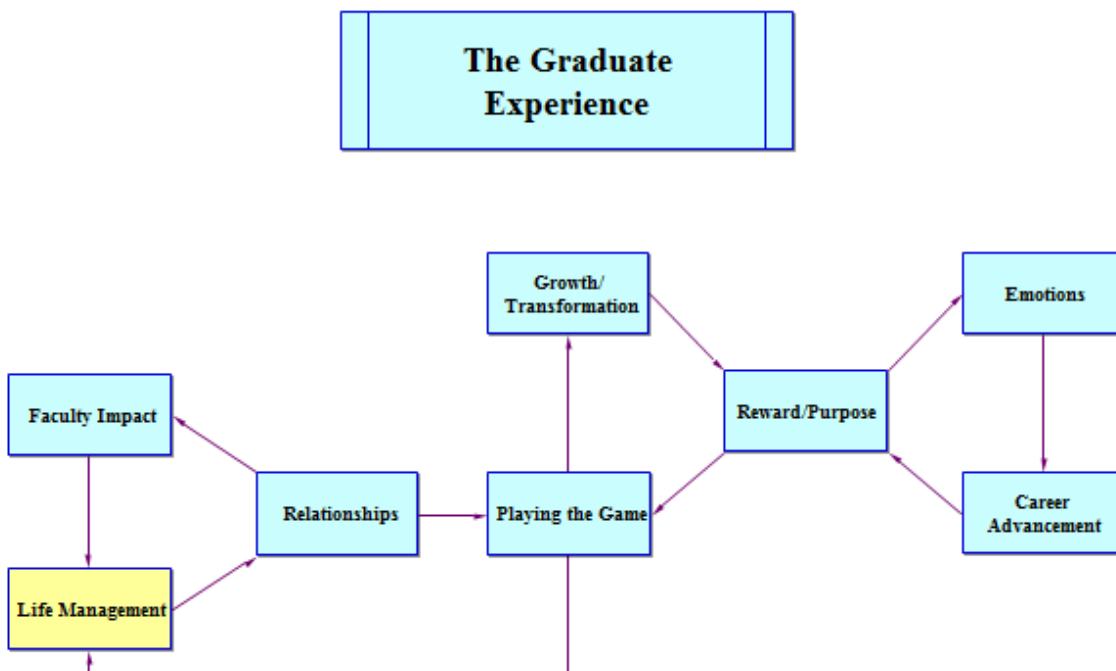
stumbling block often prevents students from accomplishing their academic goal in graduate school and professional goals in the job market.

Selection of committee members is the foundation that must be laid first before the student begins the research for their dissertation. This begins by finding a chair, which is often the student's advisor, but not always. Committee members are usually selected from faculty relationships built through classes and research projects. They can be cooperative and support the research project or antagonistic and prevent completion. Students consider topics they find personally fascinating or that are convenient because they mirror research they are currently conducting within a department grant. Yet, while the picture appears rosy, there can be a host of challenges. First, the topic may not be supported by the committee and, if it is, the methodology may be criticized. Then, the organization and timeframe may not work for some committee members. Some graduate students write poorly and are sent back for revision upon revision. This may lead to semesters or years of delays. In some cases, the committee never agrees upon the work being completed. In other cases, committee members must be replaced for a variety of reasons, thereby delaying the process. Those students who cannot get a committee of faculty to approve the thesis or dissertation must settle for an ABD (all but a doctorate), which tells others that all of the coursework, testing, and requirements were completed except for the capstone project. Ultimately, students must be savvy in the process of selecting the appropriate committee, topic, and method of presentation.

## Life Management

*“Life is like spinning plates. You have a lot of different plates spinning at the same time and you just have to keep them moving. Sometimes they wobble and sometimes they are spinning nicely and it just depends on how smoothly you are getting things done.” – Interviewee*

Figure 5.4. Systems Influenced Diagram of the Graduate Experience Highlighting Life Management



Faculty Impact drives Life Management in this system and in this first loop. Life Management includes the sub-affinities: managing time, schedules, finances, work, home life, travel, family, friends, and relaxation. All aspects of a student’s personal life determine his or her personal, family, and societal responsibilities. Many students who work while going to school and who have spouses and/or children often find it difficult to be disciplined because so many people count on them to fulfill specific roles. Studies show that married students in graduate school have a significantly higher rate of completion (Price, 2006). According to Joseph Price (2005), “being married has a positive effect on both male and female students. Male students



who are married at the start of graduate school are on average 3.9% more likely to graduate by any given year and they complete their degrees 0.32 years quicker than single male students. Married female student are not any more likely to graduate but they do complete their degree .21 years quicker than single female students” (p. 1). Family is one aspect of the graduate student experience that is often not considered in research studies of graduate student completion, yet it plays an important role. One interviewee exclaimed, “I joke with people that my goal is to finish my Ph.D., not be divorced, and still know the names of my children.”

Balance continues to be the key challenge for students. One interviewee said, “My whole life has become about trying to find balance so that I can get the work completed and not kill myself in the process.” With assignments and requirements, “There is just always something, so it is hard to balance the needs of my family sometimes because I know I have this pressing work, this pressing paper, or something. There is always something, so in order to try to manage everything, you just do the best you can and sometimes there is just not enough time. Normally, something has to be sacrificed and most of the time that is sleep.” Students do the best they can do as they sacrifice a significant part of their home life for school. One student said, “I do not know if I manage my life correctly, but I do have some balance anyway.” Another remarked, “Oh yeah, I am married too! I cannot forget about him; that is terrible. We do not seem to have a lot of time to spend together but who does?”

Finances are difficult for many graduate students as they grapple with how they will afford their education and continue to pay for life expenses, family, and other activities. Studies show that financial support is one of the most important factors in Ph.D. completion and attrition (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; CGS, 2010; Nettles & Millett, 2006; Stratton, O’Toole, and Wetzel, 2005). When funding is available, such as in the sciences, time-to-degree is shorter than

in fields where full funding is not as prevalent, like in the humanities (CGS, 2010). Also, in some disciplines, continuous funding is available throughout the year. A dialogue between two students was captured in an e-mail. “I understand how difficult it is to pay for college; I am barely able to pay for a new computer.” A second student replied, “Pay for a computer? I am lucky if I can pay for an apartment and food.” With an estimated time to degree of seven to eight years, the loss in income, disposable resources, and work experience can make life difficult. One person explained it like this, “What if I do not have enough money to pay rent next month and I do not have a place to live. It is not a fear of failure, because I am too determined to fail. It is the other things, the intangibles that I cannot control.” According to the Council of Graduate Schools’ Findings from Exit Surveys of Ph.D. Completers (2009), “Four-fifths (80%) of respondents indicated that financial support was a major factor in their ability to complete the degree” (p. 14).

Since college financing is a critical factor in student completion, students should explore a variety of options including fellowships, teaching assistantships, and graduate research assistant positions. First, these positions help finance school, but second, students obtain valuable skills while also receiving educational funding and a stipend. Graduate students also get the opportunity to do work that is relevant to their studies which often conveniently on the campus and does not require additional travel. The Council of Graduate Schools study (2009, p. 12) reported,

About 70% of respondents with financial support had received teaching assistant stipends; 59% had received a university or department fellowship or scholarship; and 55% had received a research assistantship stipend. A little over one-fifth of the graduates were recipients of private or external nationally competitive fellowships or scholarships,

and less than 10% had received a private or external locally competitive fellowship or scholarship. A small percentage of recipients of financial support were on work study programs (2%).

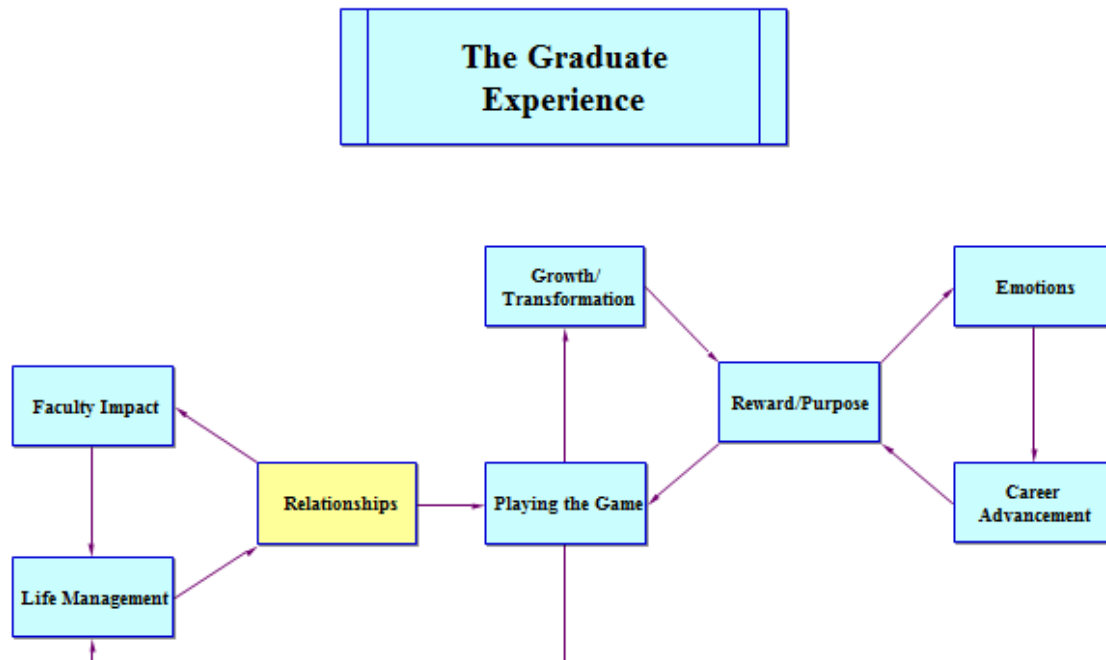
In the Ph.D. Completion Project, 91-96% of doctoral students reported that they received funding of some sort (CGS, 2009). It has been said, “time is money” and in a graduate program that can last for many years; this is a significant expense. Thus, for those students who ABD, stop out, or drop out late in the process, many languish in mental exhaustion afterwards (Fitzwilson, 1999).

Some schools have developed avenues to increase student support through supplemental stipends, fellowships, alumni donor scholarships, summer research awards, and conference travel support. Brown University offered workshops through their Career Services Center to obtain external grants and honored 117 recipients in their first year. Michigan State University created a one-semester S-STEM Incentive fellowship for 14 engineering students in their department so they could prepare for their exams rather than work during that term. The University of Michigan created the Rackham Engineering Awards to provide fellowship money for three years and then teaching or research assistantships for two additional years. Many other programs exist and more are being developed as graduate schools better understand the link between financial support and completion (CGS, 2010).

### **Relationships**

*“Some choose to be collaborative to get there, some choose to step on whomever they need to, and others do whatever they have to do to get the Ph.D. in their name.” – Interviewee*

**Figure 5.5. Systems Influenced Diagram of the Graduate Experience Highlighting Relationships**



The last of the elements in this first stage and in the first loop is Relationships. The predominant sub-affinities were identified in the study as: family, friends, faculty, and cohorts. Each type of relationship can serve as a support system and a link to other students. The overall impact of relationships transcends school, home, and personal life. One student explained, “All of my relationships are impacted by graduate school because it changes the way I relate to my husband, children, parents, students, and friends.” Another said, “Talking to other graduate students and hearing that everybody else is going through the same experiences helps you to not feel quite so overwhelmed.” Studies show that students who integrate, socialize, and develop relationships reflect a greater sense of ease, satisfaction, and acculturation (Gardner, 2009; Nettles & Millett, 2006).

Graduate school faculty and administrators can facilitate the development of relationships. “Socialization in doctoral programs should also include developing specific skills,

such as working collaboratively or in teams, conducting interdisciplinary research, and managing people and projects” (Maki & Borkowski, 2006). This can happen as part of an organized cohort environment where students come in together and share in coordinated group projects or through relationships built through classroom associations. Group projects, team presentations, and breakouts to discuss research or class lectures offer opportunities for students to interact and get to know their classmates better. Some universities have aided in this effort by providing graduate student lounges and study areas where students can congregate and have a group area (CGS, 2010; Carroll, 2008), such as the G. Forrest Woods Memorial Atrium where faculty and students in the College of Chemical and Life Sciences at the University of Maryland can gather.

Without relationship building, though, many students experience isolation and “loneliness because you feel like you are one small piece of a huge puzzle. Sometimes you have difficulty finding your place in what you are trying to do.” Faculty relationships can offer perspective and guide students in understanding the overall culture of graduate school. Student relationships can also provide friendships. When those friendships are not cultivated, students often express unhappiness with the graduate experience or fail to fully integrate. As one student put it, “I am just lonely. I keep reminding myself that it is just another year and few months and then I will be done and in a new environment.” Those students who worked full time or had families with children were often unable to participate fully in department activities and they did not feel the same bond with their classmates. One student explained, “Most of the time, my kids are already asleep before I get home. I see my children a couple of days out of the week, if that.” Another student said, “I work full-time and I also have a part-time job. I have a family and kids at home. With work in one direction, school in another, and my home in another location, when I

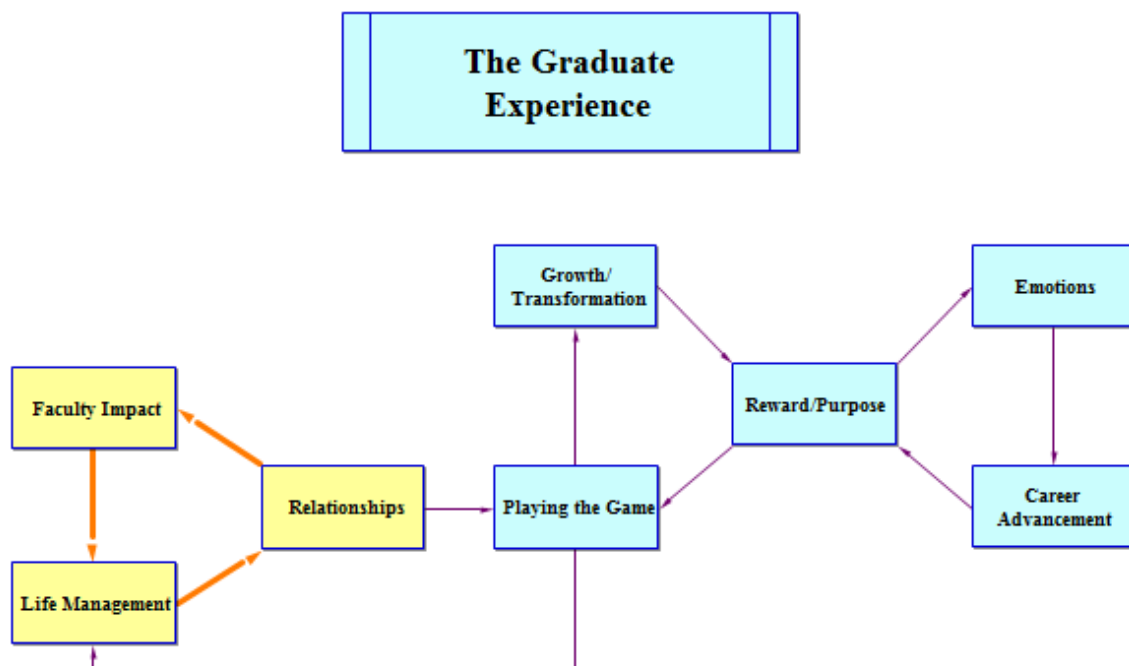
have special projects, I commute 1500 miles each week from home to work to school making a triangle in different directions.”

Even in cohort programs, “There is an assumption from outsiders looking in that, if you are in a cohort, it is one big happy family and that everything is wonderful all the time. That is not necessarily the case. There is a lot of stress and tension at times between members of the cohort. However, when it is all said and done, I truly enjoy the time I spend with them.” Cohorts can become friendly, work well in teams, and respect one another, but one interviewee reminded the researcher, “You did not choose this group, it was chosen for you. You came in and the director of the program had already picked the 12 or 15 people.” Cohorts offer an incubator to get to know fellow students both on and off campus. Students comment that they can see how their cohort can lead to better networking down the road and the chance to collaborate with other students in the same field. One student said, “The team concept of our cohort makes a big difference in how we work together. Our cohort allows students to make friends easier and share experiences with fellow colleagues, some of whom are very experienced, professional, and knowledgeable.” Cohorts are tied together for the period of time they work together. According to an interviewee, “The first people I met in my cohort were the glue that held me to our intense schedule, group projects, and travel requirements. Even those who were not in my cohort, but in other cohorts and other departments, have been incredibly supportive. The relationships I developed have made the experience enjoyable and, when it was tough, bearable.”

Cohorts have increased in popularity, in part, due to a significant improvement in trust, cohesiveness, and satisfaction (Greenlee & Karanxha, 2010). These distinct groups unite students through shared courses, interconnected programs, and closer ties with faculty. The group dynamics of cohorts can shape graduate student socialization both positively and negatively. In

some cases students do not want to work with the other members or act competitively. One student said, “Some choose the collaborative route, some choose to step on whomever they need to, and others do whatever they have to in order to get their Ph.D.. Not that they step on people, but they see it as a necessary evil. Some students do not believe they have to nor do they choose to form relationships.” Students do form closer bonds, but some students can get lost or feel pressured by the rest of the group (Hill, 1995). Students sometimes describe their cohort relationships as “disempowering” or “difficult”. Students often have to bridge the gap of experience and awareness by looking through cohort members’ lenses, which can be difficult when they are shooting for the same goal, yet come from very different experiences.

**Figure 5.6. Stage I – Orientation and Socialization**

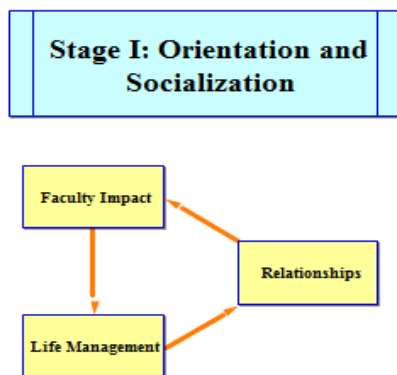


## The Graduate Experience Feedback Loop #1

### Stage I – Orientation and Socialization

The feedback loop, as seen below, presents three elements in a subsystem: one affinity leading to another. Faculty Impact is the driver, which influences Life Management, and that leads to Life Management influencing Relationships. Finally, Relationships, provided the student does not continue down the system to Playing the Game, wraps around to influence Faculty Impact once again.

**Figure 5.7. Stage I Feedback Loop**



From the time graduate students apply and are accepted, they begin the mental process of transitioning to their new life in their new environment, even if they attended the same university as undergraduates. Preadmission recruitment, intensive summer preparation programs before students begin their coursework, transparent websites that reveal statistics and a thorough review of program information, and opportunities meet with faculty and students before acceptance can help both the students and faculty better prepare for Stage I and integrate more fluidly into the



department. At this stage, orientation is crucial because it frames what is required and expected. This feedback loop shows that relationships and the socialization process with faculty, family, students, peers, friends, and administrators should be a major focus of orientation programs. If Stage I fails, it is possible that graduate students will not complete their program. Tinto (1975) explains that the extent to which a student integrates into the academic and social environment determines a student's persistence. The dropout rate of doctoral students during their first year of study is estimated to average ten to fifteen percent (Bowen and Rudenstine, 1992).

The mentor/advisor role is critical in providing graduate students with the sense of how they will achieve their goals. Faculty accessibility was identified by the students surveyed as an important factor that aided the graduate student through the process and one of the most valuable determinants in their success. One student explained, "Whenever a faculty member is gone for a long time or I cannot get a hold of them, it is only a problem if there is a deadline. On the positive side, there are professors who have truly been very generous with their time." The frequency of meetings between a research supervisor and the graduate student is critical to the bond developed and the depth of interaction, but Li and Seal (2007) found that the quality of these meetings is even more important. Those faculty who are accessible are often also available for advising, mentoring, motivating, researching, networking, and serving on committees. Those faculty who do not make themselves available, serve as sources of discontent. "A few disempowering faculty members act as if they are too busy and are never available. They make me feel like I am on my own and being on your own is very difficult in the doctoral process."

Good mentors and advisors have excellent listening skills, encourage discussion, are open to divergent opinions, provide constructive feedback, and are genuinely concerned about the students with whom they oversee. The committee chair's dual role to support and guide the

student while also insisting on quality and thorough attention to detail can make the relationship tense. At times this can lead to conflict and contradiction as a committee member attempts to encourage, yet reject the student or insist on regular intervention and feedback while simultaneously seeking the student's independence and autonomy. Most universities have highly developed mentoring and advising systems. From the moment a student enters their doctoral program they begin their guided journey. Through this advising, graduate students are provided a course of action. This association continues generally throughout the program until completion, although in some cases, the advisor leaves, dies, or is incompatible.

By creating a timeline for completing the entire process, the advisor provides the student with a good sense of what is required, steps to achieve the goal, and an estimated time to completion. Class sequencing and scheduling are areas where students need assistance. David Damrosch of Columbia University, whose large graduate program appeared to have a wide range of course options, sensed "sheer embarrassment of the riches we were offering" (p. 42). He went on to explain that their survey data on course selection "revealed widespread dissatisfaction with the lack of advice on courses. Our advising got weak reviews at all levels, but by far the lowest marks went to course advice – an area I had never thought needed attention at all" (Walker, et. al, 2006, p. 42).

Certain courses are more effective if taken in a specific order, although this is not always possible based upon terms in which the course is offered, timing of the class, and student availability. Faculty tend to have a better understanding based upon past student successes and comments students make regarding course sequencing. One student remarked, "You rely on their advice in terms of course selection, direction when you are writing papers, developing topics and talking about dissertations." Many universities have developed integrated survey classes that

provide an overview of the field, curricular process, professional expectations, subspecialty research, and personal goal analysis. This type of introduction offers students a foundation for them to see the entire picture of the graduate experience and where their puzzle piece may fit in, or adapt to, the changing landscape.

According to the data, the roles faculty play influence graduate students' lives and thus the way they manage their days, weeks, months, and years. One student said, "If the faculty has a project they want me to complete, I stop what I am doing and I work on that project." Since faculty assign projects, give grades, determine research and teaching assignments, they have significant influence. My advisor "was the one who picked me up when I was down, dusted me off, counseled me, and sent me back on track," explained an interviewee. The way life is lived, at least during graduate school, is somewhat shaped by faculty as one student explains, "Speakers come and we go out to dinner with them; faculty also come. Faculty set the tone for the atmosphere. They have certain expectations for each of us and we live up to these."

Students who work or have children encounter specific challenges. Those with full-time day jobs can only take evening classes, while those students with school-aged children may have to take the bulk of their courses during the day. Since many classes are offered once a year or once a semester, this means that if the student cannot take the class due to timing one year, they may have to wait an entire year to complete that course requirement. The advisor can help the student get the 30,000 foot picture of the university's schedule so that they can complete all of the requirements. Student interviewees lamented the fact that universities, in general, and professors, in particular, are inflexible with respect to attendance policies, participation, and group projects. In the age of technology, their consensus was that universities should offer more options for students who work, travel, or may be unable to attend a class in person.

Life Management, in turn, impacts Relationships as identified in the sub-affinities: close school friends, acquaintances, faculty, cohort members, family, and outside school friends. One student regretfully stated, “I do not see my family much. I may go home once a year, maybe.” Another one said, “Most of my family went to graduate school, but none of them got a Ph.D., so they do not really understand the intensity because the difficulty increases possibly ten times when you go from a master’s degree to a doctorate.” The way that students manage their lives determines, to some extent, their relationships.

The loop cycles back around from Relationships to Faculty Impact. “Family has been the greatest challenge for every person, but again, faculty explained this from the very beginning. Managing life outside the college, they told us, would be difficult, and it has been.” Relationships with family and children influence school-life on multiple levels, although according to Nettles and Millett (2006), “The presence in the household of children under the age of eighteen appears to have been an impediment to completion only in the field of education” (p. 174). Working on academic and personal relationships, while at the same time building relationships with faculty leads to managing life until that loop of faculty, life, and relationships is secure. Until school and life are in balance, it seems like “spinning plates” or “juggling balls” as the students described this part of the process. All three of these affinities are interwoven as evidenced by this student. “If my advisor wants to start a project and he identifies me and my colleague on the project that will affect our relationship. It will make us come closer together or make us hate each other. Without faculty to organize these types of projects, I would not necessarily spend time with the people chosen for these research projects or take this type of time away from my family.”

In this Stage I Orientation and Socialization period, graduate students are the most vulnerable. Stage I requires graduate students to interact and communicate with others, develop mutual respect, resolve conflicts, and appreciate the seriousness of the work that will be required along the rest of the journey. Those people who are ill-equipped to communicate their experience and are not adept at interpersonal skills, will struggle in team tasks. For those who lack confidence, this stage will feel intensely difficult and could strain all of their relationships. They may feel lost, alone, and need to find a support system within their classes, at home, or from the university's counseling center. In order to survive, the most vulnerable students may be heavily dependent on who they know for validation. Successful progression to the next stage may be a function of how well the student relates to people in their respective groups or at least their perception of how they feel working with those around them. If this is not resolved, graduate students may drop out or at least stop out for some period of time.

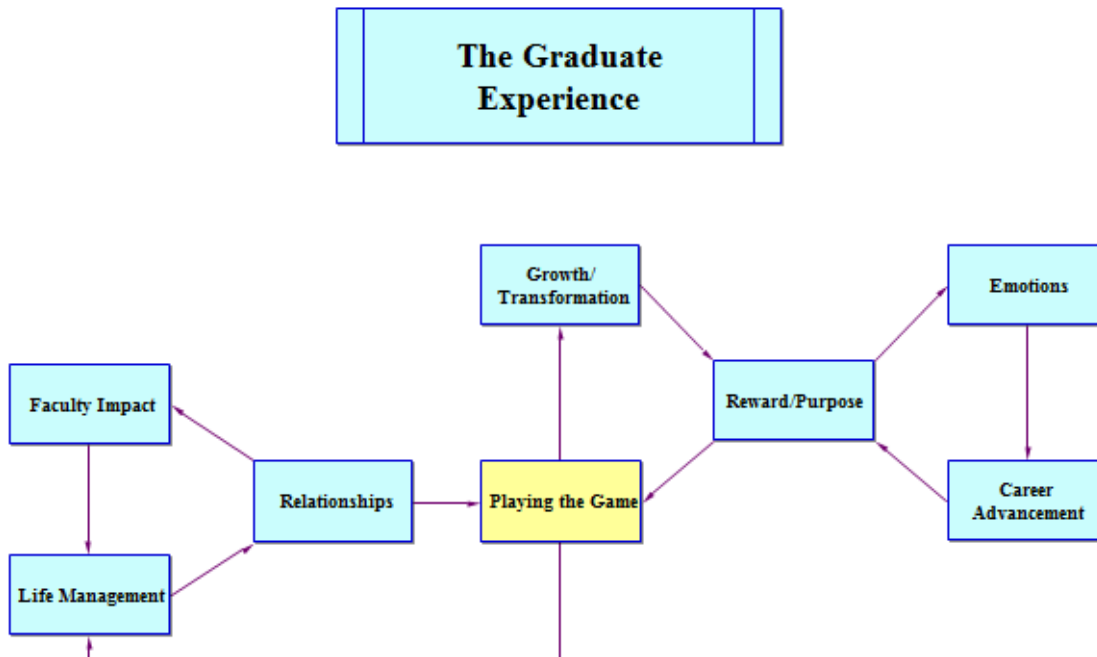
## The Graduate Experience Feedback Loop #2

### Playing the Game – Life Management – Relationships

#### Playing the Game

*“When you are at the graduate level and at the mercy of the bureaucracy, you are really in the crunch of it all. You realize that there are hurdles ahead and you must leap over them, but sometimes you fall flat on your face.” – Interviewee*

Figure 5.8. Systems Influenced Diagram of the Graduate Experience Highlighting Playing the Game



Graduate school has an unofficial set of rules which students identified as the affinity Playing the Game. Students described Playing the Game with the following major sub-affinities: bureaucracy, knowing the rules, choosing a thesis/dissertation committee, and developing

strategic relationships. One student provided an overall summary of the student's role in graduate school.

Part of being a graduate student is recognizing that you are entering a world that is highly political. How you present yourself is part of your job. You cannot run late to school from oversleeping or leave your home in your flip-flops, because you are here for a purpose. You are in graduate school to further your career. This is the game of life. Even though grad school can be fun, sometimes you can lose sight of the fact that you are here for some serious work. At the end of the day, the professors will call you Doctor. That carries enormous significance.

It is important to remember, few of the rules in Playing the Game are codified, particularly between students, faculty, and in class interactions. Those that are more clearly defined tend to exist through administrative processes. Throughout graduate school, students must get faculty approval for each step of the process and conform to the spoken and unspoken guidelines at each juncture along the journey. According to one student, "There are formal 'rules of engagement' and there are informal rules." In both cases, relationships are critical to proceeding forward. "You cannot complete the program unless you do exactly what you are told, exactly what you need to do. Disobeying the rules is not tolerated." Some students express frustration that as an undergraduate they could choose what they studied and had relative flexibility in their path, but ironically, now they are in graduate school, their course is much more regimented. As opposed to being treated with more respect and greater support for intellectual curiosity, they felt more restricted. One student said, "I get the impression here that

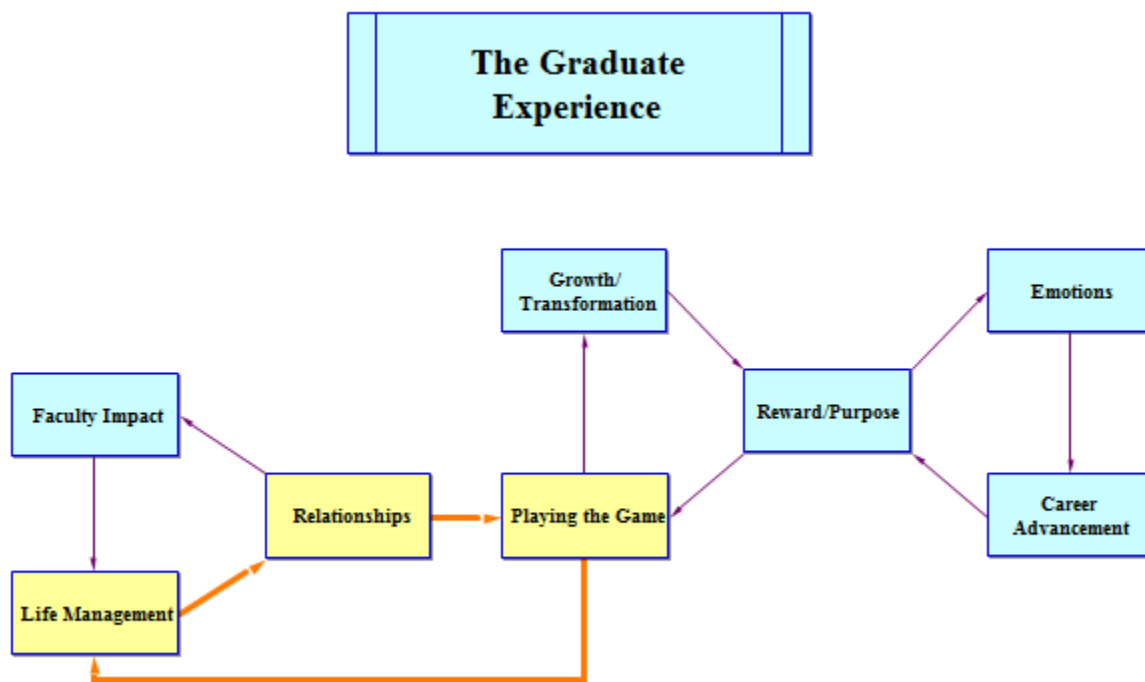
faculty talk about academic freedom, discourse, interchange of ideas, but they do not mean it. Some do, but many do not and they want you to agree with them; it creates a negative experience, but that is what is expected.” Students do what is expected and required. “You must struggle to get into classes and try to fit the pieces in place in order to get your Ph.D. and make sure the i’s are dotted and the t’s crossed. They do not teach a class on graduate politics, but it is a huge part of being successful in graduate school and surviving the experience.”

This loop contains two previous elements. The pivotal affinity here is Playing the Game. Life Management and Relationships, as described previously, close this cycle and lock the student into a closed path unless they resolve how to manage their life and build relationships while adapting to academia’s requirements. Students who are unable to adjust their lives and temperament to do what is expected and required do not transition well to the next stage. When students feel supported, they have a stronger sense of where they are headed. For some students the path is laid out. “We do really get a great orientation to what is required of us to move from day one to graduation. They were clear about the expectations, what you had to do to be successful, and how to play the game.” Yet, this is not true for many students. The transition from Stage I to Stage II relies upon adjustment and assimilation. Relationships draw students into the culture of the department or program so that they learn from faculty or hear through the grapevine the rules, expectations, and demands that are required as they go forward. “They say you are either married to your Ph.D. or your spouse, but sometimes it seems that I serve two masters,” remarked one graduate student. If graduate students do not adapt, they cycle back through this loop until they fit. It is also this point in the process whereby faculty mentors should offer students an assessment of their progress and provide advice as to how they can improve and move ahead.



Faculty advice can assist advisees as they transition to the next stage and work to better fit into the system, become more knowledgeable, and gain greater confidence. Square pegs in round holes do not match up and students must smooth out and round out their edges or else faculty will not offer the support and encouragement to proceed. Some may try to bypass this transition stage without playing the game and conforming to the mores of this culture. However, few lone wolves survive in academe without conforming to what is expected despite higher education's insistence that they appreciate diversity. Thus, the feedback loop identified by the data show that this stage sits as a holding pattern until graduate students learn the rules.

**Figure 5.9. Stage I – Orientation and Socialization**

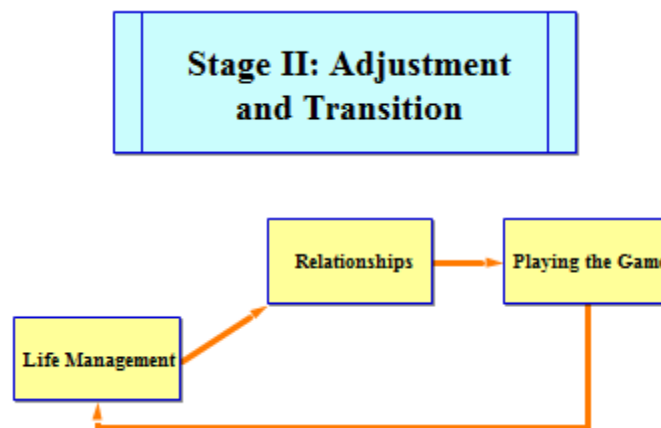


*The Graduate Experience Affinity Loop #2*

## Stage II – Adjustment and Transition

This second affinity loop occurs when students get to the affinity, Playing the Game, and are not prepared for Growth and Transformation. Growth requires an adjustment, a change in attitude, responsibility, relationships, and academic performance. When family, social, or faculty issues are left unresolved this student must revisit previous affinities until they are ready and adjust to the norms and requirements of graduate studies. When they can make this transition and are prepared to move on, they can go on to Stage III. In the figure below, the diagram shows the elements in Stage II and the feedback loop that holds this student in a cycle which revisits two of the earlier affinities in the system, Life Management and Relationships.

Figure 5.10. Stage II Feedback Loop



Playing the game is a stumbling block for many graduate students. Once they have resolved the socialization issues and are acclimated to student interrelationships and family support, they must overcome a number of bureaucratic and social issues. The first of which is the ritual of initiation and humiliation (Peters, 1997). The misnomer that initiation must be at the beginning of the experience, because it comes from the word 'initiate' meaning to begin, is not necessarily true. Often initiation occurs over a period of time after the student has been invited

into the fold and identified as a person worthy of the time involved in this indoctrination process. As in some fraternities, a student joins, participates, and is not formally a member until the second semester. In the case of Playing the Game, students must be willing to adjust their frame of reference and accept the code of behavior and both implicit and explicit requirements of academia. One student expressed his frustration about the graduate experience and the problems he was having with his committee. "This is just not fair," he said. One of the unspoken rules is that the requirements do not have to be fair, although a student who is exasperated with the problems they are facing and believes that this process is supposed to be fair will probably remain in Stage II until that lesson is learned.

Students sometimes do not know what to do and have to learn the hard way. One student said, "If you do not know how to play the game to some degree, you will commit those terrible faux pas that will throw roadblocks in front of your career as you advance. You will be face first in the mashed potatoes at dinner and you will never be invited back again." All aspects of a student's integrity, commitment, demeanor, and behaviors are scrutinized and assessed. Students often feel like they are stumbling and do not really follow everything clearly. While some feelings may become overblown or even seem paranoid, graduate experiences take on a life of their own when he or she becomes emotional. For example, one student said, "I made a dumb mistake today. I asked a professor, 'You have to have one member of your dissertation committee be outside of the college, right?' The professor said, 'This is interesting, but it is not involved with my research.' Baffled, I thought, 'Oh, it has to relate to you? I thought it was about me.'" Another student summarized this experience,

I have learned that it is more important to have a good relationship with your professors than to reveal what you really think, your true opinion. This is sad because I would want anyone, whether they are above me or below me in position, to come and tell me my flaws. Where can I improve as a person? As an academician? As a researcher? As a teacher? I would love it if a student would come to me and tell me, ‘You know, I really do not like the fact that you did this and this in class.’”

Students must have a core system of morals, confidence, assurance, and emotional balance to realize that they are worthy, they are not an imposter, and that they belong in this graduate program. For many graduate students the humiliation undergone in this stage is not an exaggeration whether they are being demeaned by professors or putting themselves to task for not feeling that they are good enough (King & Cooley, 1995; Kuman & Jagacinski, 2006; McElwee & Yurak, 2007; Parkman & Beard, 2008). One interviewee said, “If you get a bad grade, you feel bad. You feel you are not growing and that makes you feel depressed .” Students often feel that they are not worthy. Lauren (2008) wrote in the article, “No, You’re Not an Imposter”, “She worries that someday her colleagues might wise up and out her as an imposter, a fraud in a lab coat” (p. 1) The sense of not fitting in is not uncommon and this sometimes translates into how they feel about themselves. “Imposters hear the compliments and affirmations of their work, but are unable to attribute that success to their own skills and abilities, causing the individual to spend a great deal of time explaining why they truly do not deserve the praise” (Parkman and Beard, 2008, p. 30). Parkman and Beard go on to say, “In the mind of the imposter, it is very clear that if he or she were truly up to the task, and the right person for the job, it would not be necessary to work so hard” (p. 31).

Playing the Game is never finished. Students must have a keen sense of their life's telltale to set their mainsail and jib for the right course. As opposed to undergraduate education, graduate students are often responsible for the direction they head. One interviewee, paraphrasing William Ernest Henley, stated, "I am the captain of my own ship, master of my fate." While this is atypical of the majority of graduate students, some students feel in greater control of their destiny due to their self-esteem, experience, and abilities. Even though the journey through academia may last long after they finish graduate school, some are better able to negotiate the rogue waves. However, other students express a sense of frustration and stress as they flounder in the ocean of uncertainty. In undergraduate education, navigation channels are often clearly marked with a relatively specific path toward degree attainment. Such is not generally the case in graduate school where graduate students are expected to be independent (Gardner, 2009; Walker et. al., 2008) and are not sequentially marched through a specific set of courses and research projects. Advisors often impact the direction a student heads, but there is great leeway to formulate the student's plan of action. Beyond graduate school, there continue to be rules and protocols to move forward in terms of obtaining and succeeding in a chosen career. Furthermore, Playing the Game, in one way or another, may continue throughout the course of an individual's life and career.

This is also a point where students may feel that they must grapple with the ethics of student conduct. They must decide which games are fair, just, decent, or simply required. On a personal level, this may be interconnected to a student's dependence on or use of illicit drugs, prescribed or over the counter pharmaceuticals, or wired by 'study aids' such as Ritalin, Adderall, energy potions, and caffeine. Another question that arises is, "How much help is too much?" This might refer to editing, selecting resources, getting someone else to help figure out a

problem, working through a computer problem, clearing away a requirement, or hiring someone to transcribe a taped interview. After all, if students are looking to their mentors for what is acceptable behavior, there are sometimes questions as to whether the faculty member wrote the articles they author, responded to the blog that bears their name, researched the ideas to which they are credited, identified expenses appropriately on a grant, designed the PowerPoint they presented as their work at a conference, or even signed their own name to a document. Most students know that plagiarism is wrong and that they should give attribution to the original author, but knowing what is stolen and what is acceptable usage is often blurred. Students often do not know how much of someone else's idea they can use as theirs, what 'Internet scouring' resulted in their unique thoughts, and how to appropriately cite wise reflections from a faculty member who shares an idea they insert into a paper. For some, the line of demarcation between one's own work and that of an original idea-generator is gray. Other questions can also be confusing such as whether or not to have an intimate relationship with a classmate, interview for a job just for experience, manage a relationship with a classmate who sabotages another student's experiment, or even go out drinking with other students. An open dialogue, possibly outside of the department structure, should be led by someone who is sympathetic and not judgmental regarding behaviors, emotions, and actions during this period is more important than it may seem on the surface. Maybe an anonymous blog could be created with computers not linked to a particular student could be set up to answer some of these questions.

A basic overview of ethics in graduate school can occur during Stage I's Orientation and Socialization. However, it is not until the student faces significant challenges or attempts to answer puzzling dilemmas in Stage II's Adjustment and Transformation period do they really appreciate the deep questions about the academy that they may not understand, if anyone truly

ever understands them. Clearly, the data in this study that created a feedback loop cycling back in Stage II, Adjustment and Transition, suggest that a significant number of students do not go on to Growth and Transformation in Stage III, Navigation and Transformation, without understanding how to Play the Game. At this point, graduate students may not be willing to Play the Game. Not to open up a can of worms, but it is easy to see how some graduate students might be muddled in the process of determining appropriate behavior, particularly when they want to live at full tilt a life of integrity.

Socialization is also a critical component at this stage. Students gauge their own assessment of their improvement, performance, and satisfaction, in part, as a function of their academic progress, but also as a function of the relationships they have built. Connections made throughout graduate school can lead to long lasting friendships, collaboration, and projects. As students consider their future in academia or organizational leadership, they evaluate whether or not they are enjoying their journey and the people with whom they are associating. Their families may feel that they are being abandoned or ignored. Over time, spouses, partners, and children may not endure the long journey too well. One student said, “My wife is pretty resistant. I mean, theoretically, she supports this for the practical benefits it will yield, but she sure does not like it.” In the interplay between the affinities, Relationships and Playing the Game, there is an important component where “students acquire the attitudes, beliefs, values, and skills needed to participate effectively in the organized activities of their profession” (Nettles & Millett, 2006, p. 89). Without accepting these as part of the requisite skill set, graduate students cannot participate fully and assimilate in the culture of authority, productivity, wisdom, and differentiation in which the rules of the game are defined.

The socialization process from Relationships to Playing the Game is also found in how faculty transmit attitudes and professional skills to students preparing them to move forward. It is for this reason that cohort programs, which shepherd students by demonstrating appropriate behaviors, often bring in guest speakers to show students successful presentation styles and teach best practices in the field. During these presentations, students interact with teachers and leaders. They are taught hidden rules and political agendas, while being guided to better understand how to facilitate and lead organizational environments. In research-oriented programs, where the value of extraordinary writing and creative research are held in high esteem, relationships with mentors encourage proposal writing, funding for national meetings, and interaction with discipline leaders. In one report (Maki & Borkowski, 2006, p. 125),

A great majority of English Ph.D.s (at least 75%) reported that they did not experience faculty mentoring in the following areas:

- Learning how to write proposals
- Getting assistance with publishing
- Identifying opportunities to present research
- Identifying sources of funding for national meetings
- Identifying opportunities to interact with individuals from the non-academic sector

On another level, continuing on the graduate school path requires focused and steadfast commitment to professional development and an unwavering sense of determination. Students must perform well in all modes of academic performance, department integration, personal behavior, and professional conduct. The expectations can include, but are not limited to:



disciplined reading, brilliant idea-generating, articulate public speaking, accepted peer-reviewed journal writing, willingness and ability to deliver at department seminars with eloquence, eagerness to support fellow classmates, adeptness in mingling with professors, along with taking classes, pursuing independent study, and attending conferences.

At times, playing the game seems like a maze of requirements and, at each step, failure to present well in the faculty's eyes may result in faculty admonishment, or at a minimum humility for those humbled by the event or ego inflated narcissism for those who are overconfident. According to one student, "As far as playing the game with the faculty, I find it silly and ridiculous that given the level of professionalism, the level of pay, the level of experience, that you have to take care of their care and feeding." Faculty lead and direct the experience in unspoken paradigm of structure, power, and rules. This is why Playing the Game is so elusive and difficult for some students to navigate and even for some faculty who have not been accepted into the 'old boys' network. The important point is that quality of academic writing, speaking, and research alone is not a condition for success. Faculty perceptions of seriousness, willingness, focus, compatibility, and deportment are also evaluated. "You need to know how to take the hits and roll with the punches so that you can ultimately accomplish your goal and finish" declared one student. Thus, a student must adjust themselves to fit the mold of the model graduate student and then transition to the next stage in the process. Without this adjustment, they are relegated to return to the elements in Stage I until they are ready to conform.

### ***The Graduate Experience Feedback Loop #3***

#### ***Playing the Game – Growth/Transformation – Reward/Purpose***

At this point, students have decided that they are going to play the game and move on to do what is required. This means finishing coursework, taking comprehensive exams, and setting

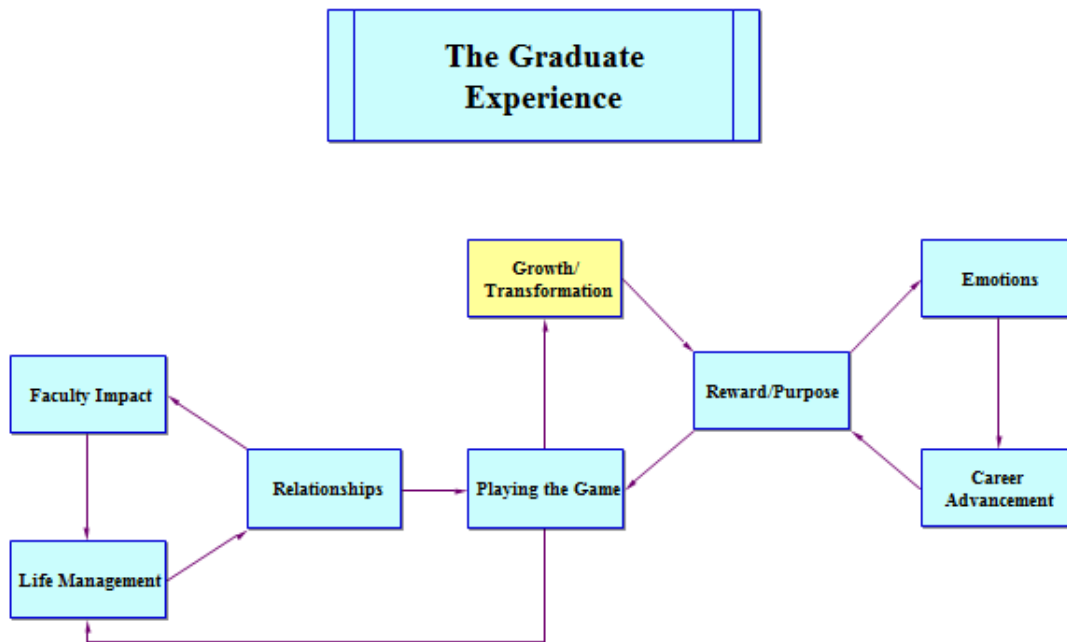
up their thesis/dissertation committees. This is no easy task, but in Stage III, Navigation and Transformation, graduate students have traveled far enough to know that in order to go forward, these things must be completed, strategic relationships formed, and the decision made to endure whatever bureaucratic requirements lay in the way. The resolve is there; navigating the rough waters is a given; transformation is inevitable. By now, graduate students should have an advisor who will possibly chair their committee. They have their family on board or at least supportive enough to go with the flow for now. Finally, they have figured out how they will manage their finances, time, family, friends, home, and personal needs for the next few years until they are done.

In Stage III, the hurdles are not over and challenges still lay ahead. Yet, graduate students seem to generate tenacity and determination as they believe they are capable of navigating through this experience. Once the affinity, Playing the Game, is accepted the student senses a deeper sense of resolve. They become intentional in their pursuit and they drive forward in the personal development phase. Those students who do not stop out or drop out do go on. This is a particularly tenuous time, because the decision must be made to deal with whatever happens or quit. One student cautions, “You have to be savvy. Some faculty members will drive you up a wall.” The next step in the process is to undergo personal Growth and Transformation, which is the next affinity in the system.

#### **Growth and Transformation**

*“Graduate school is a training ground, so if you do not start modeling the kinds of behaviors you want to emulate now, well you cannot finish this program and begin implementing personal and social change.” – Interviewee*

**Figure 5.11. Systems Influenced Diagram of the Graduate Experience Highlighting Growth and Transformation**



Students in this study identified the sub-affinities for growth and transformation as: intellectual/academic, social, emotional, and professional growth, as well as from practical experience. Students come to graduate school to learn, but each student believes they will grow in the process. One student said, “My driving force and what is keeping me here is knowing that I am growing and transforming. I have enough faith and confidence that when the time comes, this will all come together because of the things you cannot quantify. I am motivated by the knowledge I obtain.” Learning from dedicated faculty, doing original research, and developing relationships with others were identified as opportunities to intellectually progress and personally mature. “The growth that has taken place, and it was much needed in my life, was to be able to have people criticize me or have people disagree with me and be okay with that and to be okay with myself. You must be confident enough in your talents and abilities and recognize that when

others do not agree they are not criticizing you personally, but criticizing the perception of the position or the power you have.”

This growth occurs at each stage, but at this point graduate students are more mentally prepared to weather the irregular path of transformative learning. Over the years, students transform from a passive learner to an active cultivator of ground-breaking ideas. Without being pushed to think beyond the status quo, students would never be able to do the pioneering work ultimately sought after in graduate schools. “Growth and transformation seem to occur almost daily in the graduate experience because you do not know how much you are capable of accomplishing and how much further you have to grow until you are pushed. In graduate school, you are pushed quite a bit. Growth and transformation are inevitable.” The way is often not outlined and the course may seem circuitous until a barrier is overcome. One student explained their experience this way, “I do not have a map or blueprint; I just go step by step. I generally know the direction I am headed. Education for education’s sake is also important to me. Sometimes people will provide information, but not expound upon the details. So, if it really piques my curiosity, then I will do some research and find out more for myself. Also, doing research has made me more in tune with things I never would have encountered. I know I must produce, present, and prepare. Practice lifts us up beyond our fear in order to network, think ahead, and ask tough questions.”

Some of this growth can be explained by ‘Apprenticeship Pedagogy’ as described by Golde, Bueschel, Jones, and Walker in the book, Doctoral Education and the Faculty of the Future (2009). They present a distinctive, signature pedagogy of doctoral education labeled ‘elbow learning’. Small group discussions and individual advising “challenge their students, set high expectations and standards, generously share their expertise, and individually tailor their

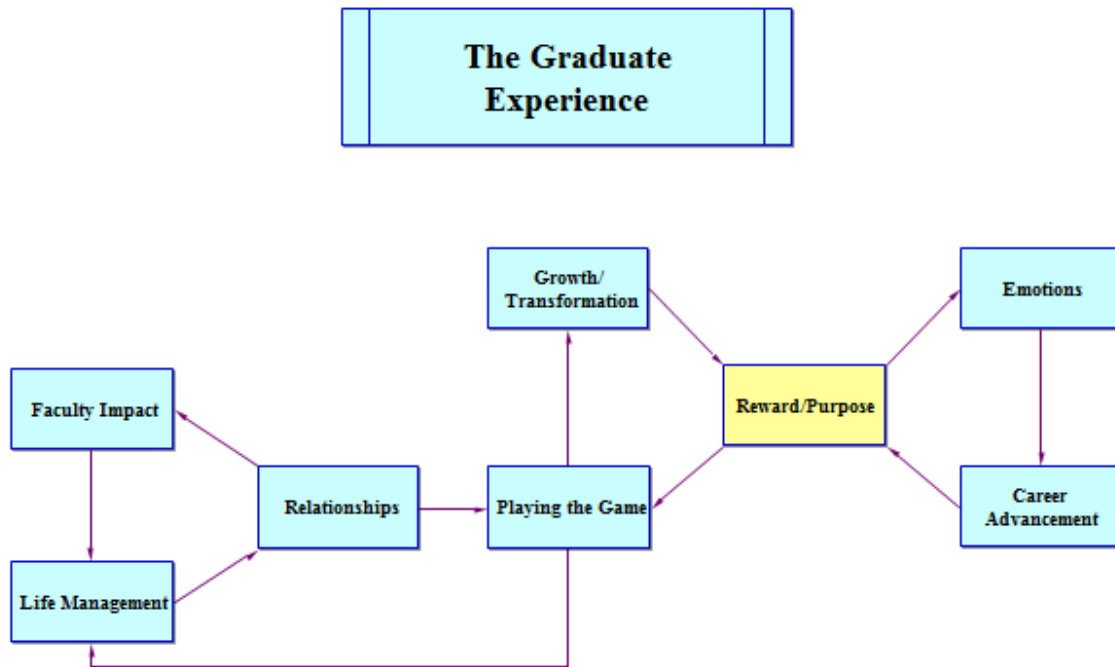
students' educational experiences to meet students' needs" (p. 54). Although they acknowledge that not all faculty relationships have this tenor, they explain that the strengths of this approach have established the United States as having an excellent reputation internationally.

One outcome of the graduate student journey was an attitudinal adjustment to events that may have seemed complex or limiting. "My emotional growth can be seen in my ability to endure and think positively about situations. Difficult situations that used to make me angry or upset are now opportunities to step back and consider all of the alternatives and not assume what lies on the surface." They can see how these changes manifest themselves in their everyday lives and how they impact their future. According to one student, "I have gone pretty far down the path in my ability to not be quite as emotionally attached to ideas. Before, this limited my ability to assess and consider other points of view in discussion and deliberations about issues. The graduate experience has helped me tremendously because, you cannot be emotionally attached to your ideas or you will get beat up." This emotional growth allows students to better choose their own pathway and be in greater control of their life. As explained by another student, "The self-exploration I have undergone as part of this process has allowed me to detach emotionally. I have control of my emotions and my thoughts. These can only control me to the extent that I allow. Each of us has the power to write our own life script."

#### **Reward and Purpose**

*"My reward comes from me and the chance to be present on this whole journey and engage with others who care, even if we disagree. It is such a revelation to have this experience where you are surrounded by people who are passionate about what goes on in the world. They want to make it better in some way. Our collective purpose becomes something much stronger and more fruitful."*

**Figure 5.12. Systems Influenced Diagram of the Graduate Experience Highlighting Reward and Purpose**



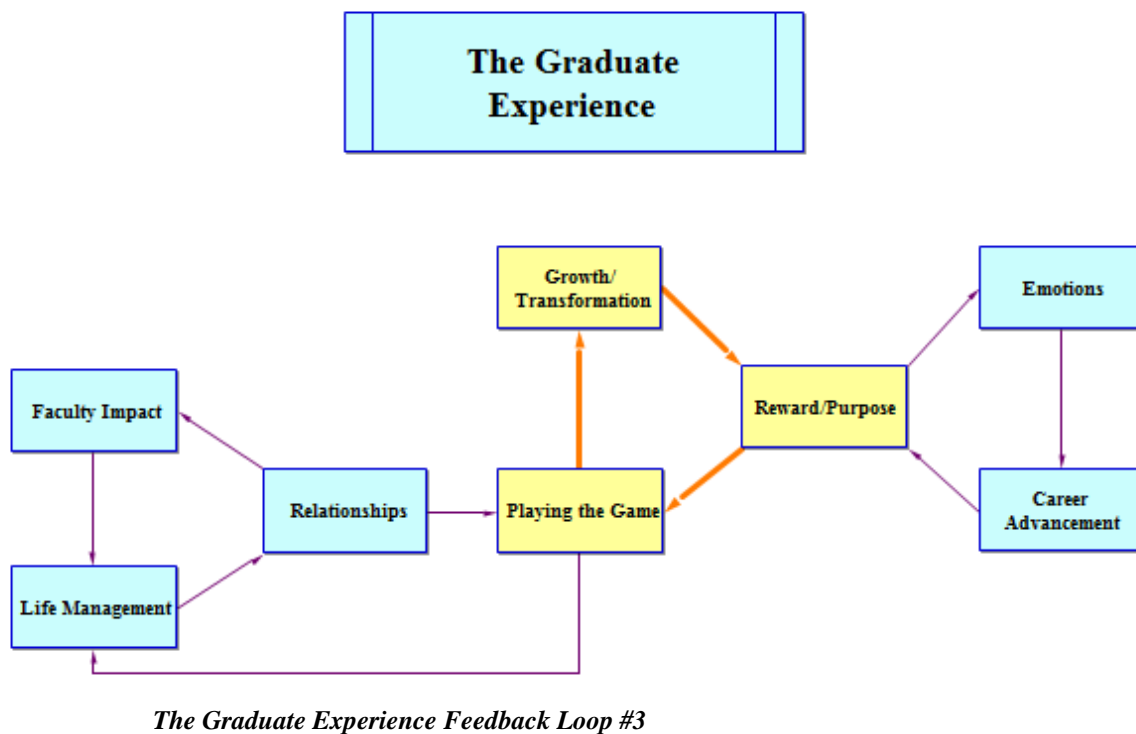
Reward and Purpose is not a destiny for many graduate students, but a percolating brew that renews itself in a heavenly aroma they enjoy throughout their days. Students in this study identified the sub-affinities: knowledge, family expectations/pride, self-validation/pride, and achieving their dream. Reaching a higher level of self-satisfaction, validation, pride, and success is about pushing your limits to see how much you can learn, master, solve, anticipate, manage, coordinate, and still have a sense of self, family, humility, dignity, and satisfaction. The feeling of accomplishment is exhilarating. This percolation sometimes happens when the person is young and imaging what the future holds for them. “I remember back when I was in fifth or sixth grade and my parents asked me what I wanted to do with my life and I said that I did not know what I want to do, but I did want to get a Ph.D..” No matter what age a student embarks upon their graduate education, often they had the notion that they would continue one day.

Those who compete in sports know this excitation well. They train, put in long hours, learn from coaches, watch the best in their field, mentally prepare, endure emotional stress,

adjust their life, and make sure they are ready even when the conditions are tougher than they expected. Athletes visualize where they are headed, chart their course, and work with a team. The key is good sportsmanship, playing the game collaboratively, and giving your personal best. Graduate students do not need to defeat others in order to succeed. Yet, there are challenges, opportunities, and benefits. Each student comes for their own reason. In response to the interview questions one student acknowledged, “What is my reward? What is my carrot at the end of the day? I have to admit that it is personal satisfaction, ego if you want to call it that, but that is my reward in the end.”

The challenge is not much different than the human drama of an individual triumphing over his or her own uncertainties. Mathematical problems are assigned that are virtually unsolvable or have yet to be solved. There is no way around this requirement, particularly if it is on a comprehensive exam, except to reach into your toolbox of all of the nuances and possible ways of poking at the problem until a solution is reached. Sometimes it is mentally draining. Sometimes the questions seem unreasonable. Yet, students often emerge feeling that warm rush from the reward of figuring out a difficult problem. “I have that internal piece that outweighs everything else. Getting a Ph.D. is a whole different kind of reward. It feels like I am getting graded on my brain and what I can produce as opposed to how I look or dress or any of those things.” Those students who love that rush say, “It is the ongoing purpose of something bigger; being in school allows me to experience that on a daily basis.” When students sense this experience holistically they may say what one interviewee commented, “It is rewarding to go to class. I love being a student; I love learning; I love reading; I love exploring my passion.”

|Figure 5.13. Stage III – Navigation and Transformation



### Stage III – Navigation and Transformation

This third feedback loop travels from Playing the Game to Growth/Transformation to Reward/Purpose. Graduate students cannot get to Stage #3 without agreeing that they will play the game. Once that decision has been made, students can move forward to academic, personal, and professional growth. With growth comes a feeling of accomplishment and the satisfaction that there is a higher purpose than just the reward of earning the degree, whether the endeavor is for his or herself or for the family, job requirements, or future career endeavors. One student said,

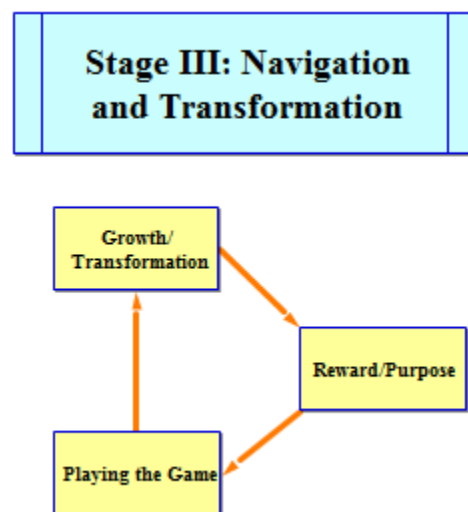
At each stage, you must be willing to venture to the next step, even if you are afraid. As you reach the dissertation and see the end, there are so many questions as to what you



will do next, but you cannot really think about that because you have to finish your dissertation; but the question does not go away. What is next? In each stage, I grow in my relationships, my perceptions, my knowledge, my writing, my analysis, my understanding of big issues, and what this all means. So, on all levels, I am growing and transforming.

This is, though, a loop, identified by student data. The result of the system did not go directly from Reward and Purpose to Career Advancement, which would have occurred if the system was more linear. This also means that for the many students in this survey, after they come out of their Growth/Transformation and arrive at Reward and Purpose, they head back to Playing the Game (58 respondents Reward and Purpose influenced Playing the Game versus 26 who responded the other way). This appears to indicate that students who arrive at their purpose and achieve acknowledgement along the way realize that there are still hurdles and bureaucracy along the trail.

**Figure 5.14. Stage III Feedback Loop**



As the graduate student enters this loop, accepts that they will play the game and do what is required. They seek to transform themselves, although conscious, intentional, and purposeful self-inquiry is never easy. Growth occurs in the student's increased knowledge and maturation as a thinker and researcher. "Growth is an intellectual exercise. Even though most of my coursework is behind me, each time I take a class, I learn from reading the material, from my peers, and from my professors." Implicitly, though, graduate students must buy into the hidden agenda of academia in order to get to Stage III, Navigation and Transformation. Ironically, this means conforming to their department's perception of a scholar deemed suitable to pass through their golden gates. This must occur before faculty approvals or signatures are granted to sign off on comprehensive exams, oral exams, research apprenticeship, or internship. After this growth occurs and transformation happens, the student evaluates their feelings of self, family, perceptions, community, goals, and ideals. They may ask themselves, "What does it mean to have this graduate degree now that I am beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel?" The resolve occurs along with the confidence stemming from growth. With self-assurance, the purpose begins to be realized.

There are many forks in the path and students sometimes do not know who to turn to because they do not want to be seen poorly in the eyes of their mentor or advisor and they know that student perceptions can be equally harmful. Still, they know to move forward because the fulfillment of their goal is worth the impediments along the way. Besides, the experience of transformation is priceless. According to one student, "Personal and professional development define this process. When I applied for this program, I spoke of life being a journey, not a destination. Boy was that right! I do not think I really knew, like I know now, about the journey.

This darn degree is a journey: a long, emotional, stressful journey that will lead to more knowledge and eventually, less stress. That is my goal at least!”

Navigating uncharted waters is daunting. Graduate students must understand discipline-specific rules and particular, and sometimes peculiar, ways of interacting with department representatives, advisors, and fellow graduate students. By Stage III, the student has or is preparing to complete oral and/or written examinations. The investment has been made. There is some solace in knowing that growth has occurred and that academic challenges can be overcome. However, the pinnacle of achievement culminates in the last stage where thesis/dissertation loom in the not too distant future and Career Advancement is close behind. These seem much more ominous in Stage III upon approach. There student is increasingly certain that he or she intends to complete graduate school and is cognizant of the strict adherence to requisite rules. The uphill climb to and through Stage IV may be more difficult than it looks. First, advisors may or not be available. Many students do not have mentors whom they can turn to for advice. Third, life happens. Over this time, marriage, children, health, home, parents, or work may no longer be amenable to this consistent effort required in graduate school. Fourth, oral/written examinations may require repeated attempts and self-doubt may fester. Fifth, financial resources may no longer be available. If a grant or project is withdrawn or completed, the faculty member for whom a teaching assistantship goes on sabbatical, or a family needs to replenish depleted funds, it is possible that money may not be accessible. Researchers estimate that of those doctoral students who have made it to this point, approximately 30 percent drop out, although few of these students leave because of the academic challenges (Bowen and Rudenstine, 1992; Golde, 1998; Lovitts, 2001).

### ***The Graduate Experience Feedback Loop #4***

#### ***Reward/Purpose–Emotions–Career Advancement***

Stage #4 is the final lap in the pursuit of the graduate student's educational goal. It is the point where students sense the reward, know their purpose, and must make it through the dissertation phase. This is not an easy task. The data show that this period is rife with emotions, which is why the system presents emotions as the next round of what seems by this time a marathon. Some students are exhausted by this time and the sacrifices they have made seem like they are mounting. One student explained, "Nowadays, sometimes I feel like I want to stop right now with what I have done and I just want to go back home to see my daughter and my family, but it is so hard living through this graduate experience. I always ask myself if the reward really worth the effort."

Like the sports announcer, Jim McKay articulately captured the emotion of athletes giving it all under the weight of enormous pressure; it is "the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat." This encapsulates the emotion of the many years of sacrifice, service, critique, and hurdles. It is the unknowing that comes with committee members who do not respond and do not seem to care or maybe they care so much that they harshly lash out at your dissertation after the twentieth revision. There is an emotional breaking point where you cannot read any more, write any more, or do any more. It is this Stage #4 heartache, delirium, and anxiety that can only be dumped in a bucket called stress.

You can quit, and some do, but you know that the results you are seeking are just around the next bend. Through the fog of late nights, mental anguish, and physical exhaustion the warm, firm, rays of the sun pierce surreptitiously through the matted sky and a glimmer of hope

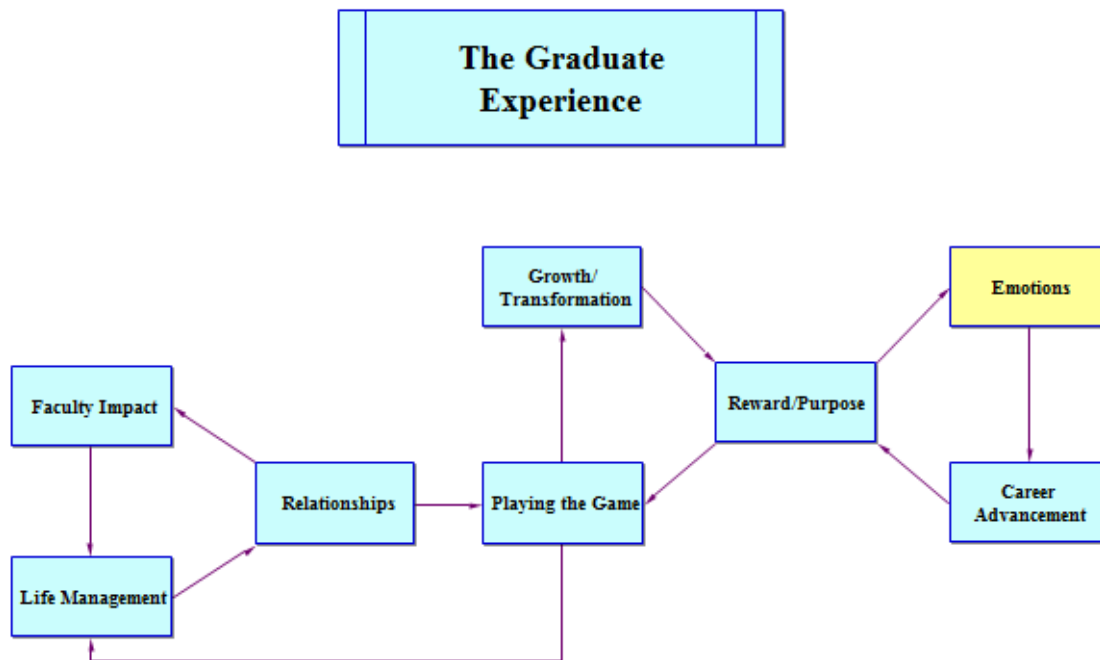
sprinkles light on your eyelids braced at half mast. Although \ bleary-eyed, you see that your dissertation is beginning to take shape and that inkling that there is a sun after all sends a rush down your spine. “Eureka,” shouted Archimedes when he sprung out of his bathtub and figured out that the king’s crown was not made of pure gold. He raced through the streets of Syracuse much the same way many doctoral students move from Reward/Purpose to Emotions to Career Advancement in this loop of defeat, enlightenment, and euphoria. So, you contact your committee and inform them of the news with the calmest demeanor you can muster in this moment where you finally see the finish line and all you have to do is put one foot in front of the other no matter what requirements are left. And thus, the dissertation ends. Career Advancement is just ahead. Reward and Purpose is next, and Emotions cycle back around the loop. The emotional battle at this stage will be crushing or it will be powerfully exciting.

#### **Emotions**

*“Graduate school is very stressful in general and just trying to manage everything is difficult.*

*There is always too much to do, so I am always stressed.” – Interviewee*

**Figure 5.15. Systems Influenced Diagram of the Graduate Experience Highlighting Emotions**



Many graduate students describe their experience as an emotional rollercoaster. The sub-affinities they identified were: stress, anxiety, frustration, fear, isolation, overwhelm, happiness and excitement. According to one student, “I have experienced a full range of emotions! You name it, I have experienced it.” That type of statement was not atypical. For many students so much is on the line and with so many requirements, hurdles, responsibilities, and costs. Family members often had their own expectations. Yet, many students pursue graduate school because they take pride in their work, have attention to detail, and put pressure on themselves to do a great job. So, when they get a low grade, criticism from faculty, or are subjected to an illogical bureaucratic barrier, they are sometimes emotionally attached to the outcome. One student said,

When my emotions go wild, I feel a little disconnected. Emotionally, this degree pursuit has given me a certain level of confidence. My thinking has not changed that much, but it has validated the way that I approach problems. I am in a position now where, when I

give an opinion or I am at a meeting and I have a thought, I share it with the group. I am more confident in sharing that thought simply because I am in a position where I am around people who are thinking about the same types of issues.

Requests, requirements, and responsibilities often compete with one another for attention. Students who are perfectionists may find that perfect is not possible on a paper when his or her child is injured or they have a car accident on the way to school. When unexpected incidents arise, some students feel out of control. "There have been times where I just think I am overloaded. I have a family; I have a job; I wonder how I make it all work? Feelings of desperation come and go. The stress comes from being overwhelmed." Graduate students must master their calendar and then be prepared for contingencies. A student explained,

In one class, I just finished a paper, have another paper on standby, got another one nearing completion. It is kind of like being an air traffic controller and you just stack 'em and rack 'em. That is just the way it is because it is hard. But, I do not think it is a bad stress; I think it is a good stress because I think stress motivates you to perform, to do the things you need to do.

Some students know that there are simply requirements and that they must finish each one sequentially in order to go on to the next.

For others it is a series of thoughts of self-doubt. "What am I doing here?" "Can I do this?" "Am I good enough?" One student said, "On some days I am actually thrilled to be here and other days I cannot figure out why as I ever went to graduate school." With that range of

emotions students question whether they have the fortitude to stay, particularly with all they are giving up. An interviewee discussed the pressure he felt saying, “There is a ton of stress going to graduate school, particularly at this level. There is stress from being away from family; stress trying to juggle everything; stress from trying to get your work done.” Fitzwilson (1999) described the challenges that arise and emotional responses of graduate students,

Dealing with the psychological stress that accompanies the lack of funds to survive the dissertation stage and the slim chances of finding a teaching position after graduation is hard enough. When coupled with the isolating nature of ABD graduate work, the stress causes many students to suffer from depression, mental exhaustion, and disillusionment with the profession. In this final culling stage, some students persevere while others make the difficult decision to abandon the dissertation in search of a more secure future.

Emotional intelligence may hold the key to learning how to deal with frustration, fear, stress, and anxiety. Most faculty believe that emotional growth should be solely left for the student to improve and that their role is to ensure that the student’s knowledge development is enhanced through their teachings. In a study on the anticipatory socialization of graduate students, Bess (1978) explains,

Typical also of such traditional notions is the idea that college students are still primarily adolescent in disposition and orientation, in capacity to concentrate on intellectual problems and in ability to sustain interest in projects of some duration. Responsibility for affective growth and development of student is left to chance or to nonacademic



programs in out-of-class settings...As many students have shown, such orientations and attitudes are unfortunate, since faculty can have important effects on student development in both the cognitive and affective domains. (289-290)

Studies show that emotional intelligence is an important factor on the job in terms of performance, satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Jaeger, 2003), yet “faculty members seldom have the time, training, experience, or willingness to help students acquire the competencies they will need to relate to clients, fellow professionals, and others in the workplace” (p. 616). One student said, “Graduate students must manage burnout. We are on a slow road to burning out, but we want to burn slowly. You do not want to be like gasoline and ignite and dissipate. So you must do whatever it takes to ensure that you do not burn yourself out. You need to have what it takes to finish this race.” One suggestion (Fitzwilson, 1999) is

that students exercise, socialize on a regular basis, maintain a healthy perspective, and seek medical help if the situation becomes unmanageable. He even suggests a final solution to continuous stress and depression: leave graduate school, even though the decision will be painful and difficult. Students will appreciate his understanding that “graduate school is like holding a wolf by the ears – you don’t like it, but you can’t let go either.”

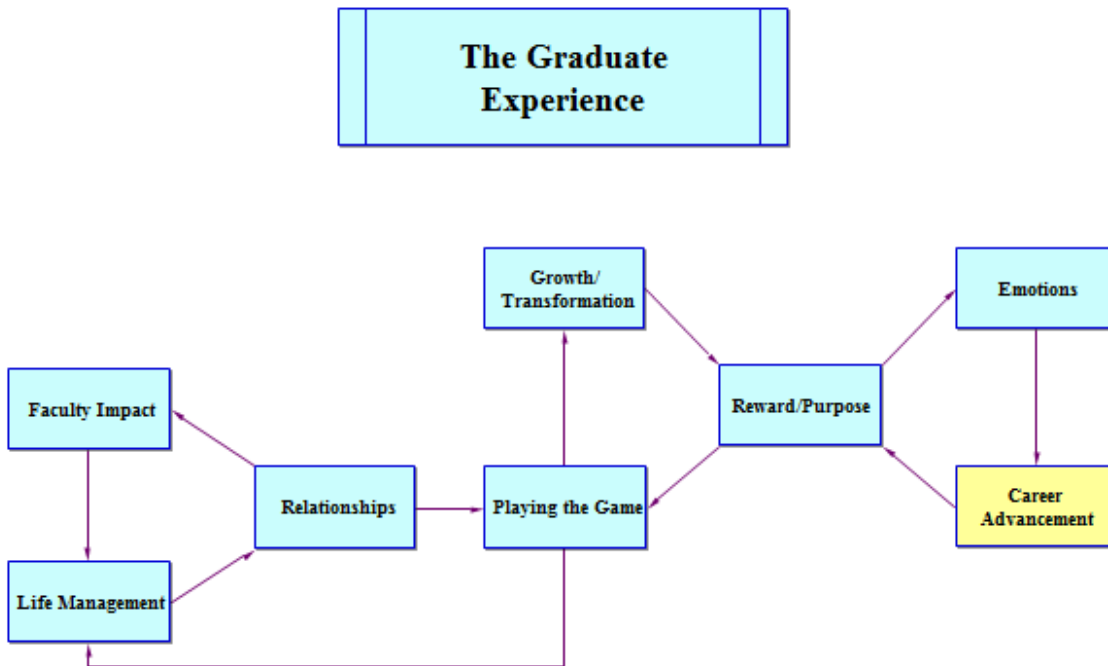
Some students say that the difficulty is often not in the coursework or the homework or the required papers. The greatest difficulty lies in outside factors. According to an interviewee, “You must manage your emotions and manage your burnout and your frustration. I feel that it is

less about intelligence and more about navigating systems, playing the game, managing your emotional well-being and your health because when stress kicks in, it is disastrous.” Emotions can affect other people in your environment too. Family members sometimes say how difficult it is for them and spouses remark they have a difficult time too. When the graduate student can communicate effectively with family members, they are more aware of what is occurring. One student said, “My family is often the only ones who truly know the prevalence of my emotional state changes. One minute, I am happy and feeling confident. The next one, I am stressed out as I try to finish a paper. Sometimes I second guess myself and my abilities and I ask myself, ‘Why I am doing this?’” That oft asked question is one that was prevalent among many interviewees.

#### **Career Advancement**

*I did not come for my health. The whole reason why I am doing this graduate degree is to put it on my resume. - Interviewee*

**Figure 5.16. Systems Influenced Diagram of the Graduate Experience Highlighting Career Advancement**



Career Advancement is stepwise progression graduate students take to utilize what they have learned and open doors to new professional opportunities. While many graduate students remain in academic circles, lots of them choose organizational and corporate positions upon graduation. Students come to graduate school for many reasons, but the sub-affinities that surround what the interviewees said in their interviews were: career options, to obtain a credential, a requirement for promotion, an avenue to become a professor, or a chance to serve the public. One student explained, “I will be able to move on to better things. I plan to finish my degree, go out into the job market, and get a decent job. I think that it will serve itself well as a female in the business world, and also in academia.” Graduate school offers this chance to fulfill this student’s goal and provide the certification to attest that they are fully qualified to hold the position they desire.

The credential is valuable, yet a study entitled “Credentialism Among Graduate Students,” explained that higher education offers an “often exclusive channel into many of the nation’s elite occupations” and, as such, “stands strategically between the elite occupations and those who aspire to them” (Stodt & Thielens, 1985, p. 252). To many, the letters behind a person’s name signify an accomplishment testifying that the individual has a standard of excellence or level of achievement recognized in many circles. In some careers, it is a requirement. “A Ph.D. is absolutely necessary if you want to do top of the line research at a university.” Other students, though, feel more a more personal sense of what the credential does for them. A student explained, “Having a Ph.D. makes you see yourself in a different light and think critically. At this level I think there is a lot of critical thinking. It just expands you in ways you would never have imagined.” Stodt and Thielens (2003) concluded that graduate students did not seek just the degree or just knowledge, but they desired both from their education.

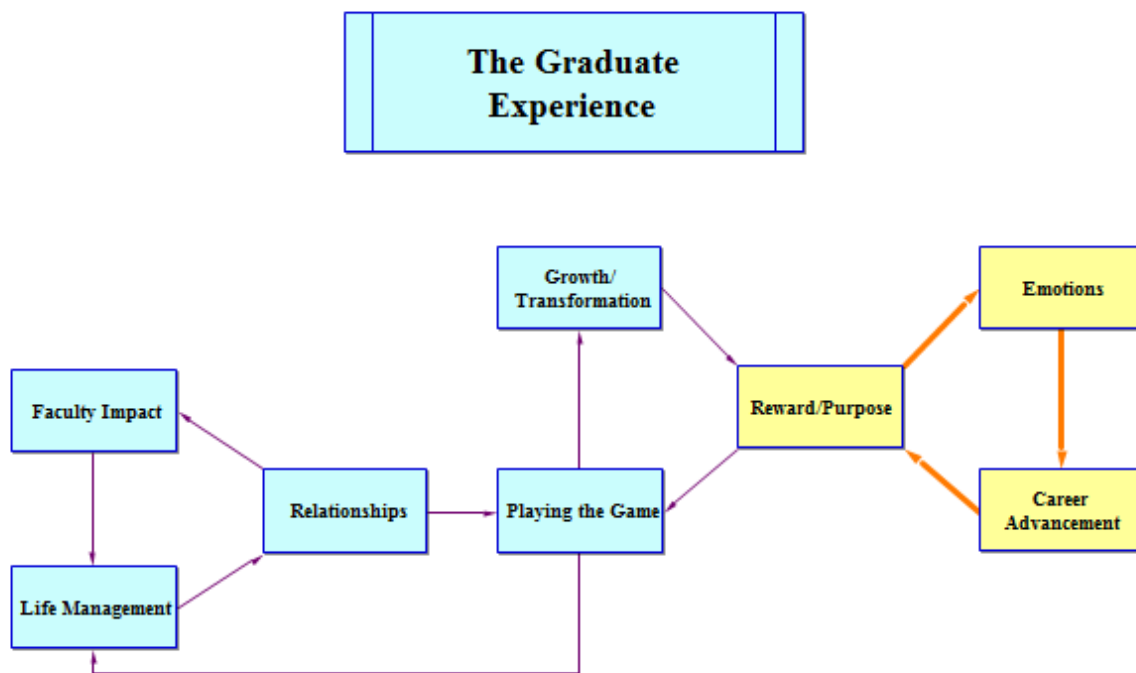
For some students, “it is not career advancement, but a chance to serve the public and make a difference. I feel like I am treading water helping one student at a time pulling students along. Career advancement is a way to impact policy so that there are more opportunities for students and more funding.” Many people want to serve. They feel as if they have a talent, intellect, or leadership skills that can benefit others and they want to sense that they are giving back. Some feel that with their energy, passion, and commitment, they can light hold the torch of hope high enough so that others can find their way. Particularly when they have faced adversity or seen tragedy, they are drawn to the learning environment. One student explained it this way,

The diversity of the students and their ideas brings me to the university. Being surrounded by people who want to change the world inspires me. We can change the

world. Just knowing that my peers and my professors are considered in the educational field as great scholars and motivators makes me raise the bar even higher. Every time I reach the bar, I set it higher.

Many students, they do not seek to climb up the ladder of success as much as they seek to grow and transform in order to realize the potential they have. Obtaining this credential or degree will avail them to a broader range of career opportunities.

**Figure 5.17. Stage IV – Completion and Advancement**



*The Graduate Experience Feedback Loop #4*

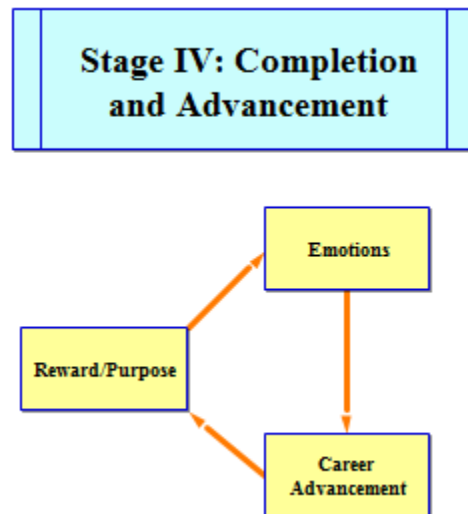
#### **Stage IV – Completion and Advancement**

This last feedback loop consists of Reward/Purpose which drives Emotion which then leads to Career Advancement. When students go from Reward/Purpose to Emotion, this is possibly due to the pressure to complete the dissertation. This last step in the graduate experience is difficult for many students. Approximately 20% give up before completing their dissertation (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992). In a study on ABD students, Jacks, Chubin, Porter, and Connolly (1983) found the following reasons for students leaving before earning their doctorate (p. 75):

Financial difficulties.....	44%
Poor working relationship with advisor and/or committee.....	44%
Substantive problems with the dissertation research.....	36%
Personal or emotional problems.....	36%
Receipt of an attractive job offer.....	32%
Interference of paid work with dissertation work.....	28%
Family demands.....	24%
Lack of peer support.....	20%
Loss of interest in earning a Ph.D.....	12%

While it is difficult to locate students who have the distinction of the ABD because universities rarely keep systematic data on these students, the loss at this point has numerous consequences such as time, cost, and demoralization (Jacks et. al., 1983). This stage is one in which all parties are heavily invested and one in which attrition can be reduced.

**Figure 5.18. Stage IV Feedback Loops**



Students explained that they experienced anxiety and fear, but also excitement and anticipation. Some people do not fare well with the emotion-packed transition through the thesis/dissertation phase. Not only is there personal desire to do well, but committee members may exert additional pressure or may be flat out resistant to the student's work. In departments where there are only a few faculty members or if some are in transition, it is difficult to change members, particularly late in the process. For some students, committee membership is extraordinarily difficult to keep constituted and, when complete, many times the members do not agree. Often, students do not consider early enough the very real problem that if they need five signatures and there are five department members, they may need every single professor on your committee. That means that graduate students cannot burn any bridges with advisors, mentors, or other faculty in the department. One burnt bridge may be the end of road or, at least, the increased probability that the committee will not support you or agree to sign off on the dissertation.

Even if you are in a situation where you can have an outside committee member or a larger selection of possible choices, you may still experience problems. Students at the start of

their program should be told that, in every course they take, those professors may be possible committee members. Thus, every course a student begins should be approached in such a way that the professor at the end of the course would want to be on your committee. You want to leave the course knowing that you could choose them to support you throughout your dissertation and approve you when you are done. That means that you should pick your classes and professors accordingly. Those who do not get along with other department members should know that they would not make good committee members.

Some committee compositions require the faculty members to be full-time and tenured. This means that if you take all of your classes from part-time or adjunct professors who teach one course in the evening, even if they are excellent, but you lose one more chance to develop a relationship with someone who could serve on your committee. Some students find themselves after a few years wishing that they had taken more classes from full-time professors or wishing that the full-time, tenured faculty taught classes that were convenient to their schedule. Students must find the requisite number of members for their committee, though, whether they have taken those professors or not.

The thesis/dissertation committee, once set is the rock from which graduate students can gain valuable ideas, although this is not always true. Sometimes, they are unable to provide the insight, support, or information you need. After all, this is an independent research project. There is an expectation that graduate students can either do independent research. The thesis/dissertation committee must have some assurance that when their mentee leave the halls of their university, they do so with the confidence and ability to bat their own wings into the atmosphere of Career Advancement. It is this assurance that allows them to confidently write a letter of recommendation for a fellowship, postdoctoral research project, faculty position, or



leadership role. One interviewee said, “It is possible that the greatest transformation happens after completing the dissertation. The harrowing journey makes the student stronger and more resilient to challenges.” There may be challenges ahead, but with the thesis/dissertation completed, weathering future storms are probably more manageable. Thus, a graduate student may know that they have significant work ahead, lonely hours of reading and research, and politics to play, but they are prepared because they endured to completion.

Completion is powerful. The road through graduate school is long with many requirements on the way. Every test is laid along the path: scheduling, courses, bureaucracy, comprehensive exams, internships, research apprenticeships, papers, presentations, conferences, and the dissertation. Exhaustion and doubt seem to beckon the graduate student to turn back. Family and personal life are replaced with schedules, deadlines, and requirements. One student exclaimed, “I am beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel, but we have all paid the price.” Choices must be made between sleeping and reading, family emergency or class, health or finishing requirements. After managing the responsibilities of family and personal life along the long road, the anticipation of success shines a bright light to the finish line.

While the decision to embark was made before the student applied, Stage #4 is the one in which the students move from the dissertation phase to Career Advancement, one of the outcomes in the system. Stage #4, Completion and Achievement, closes the system whereby students have grown, endured, learned, and have become emotionally more resilient. One student said,

The major transformation I have undergone has been long, consistent, and interesting, particularly as I reflect upon how much effort was expended in the process. I struggled

before I entered this program, especially, with my emotions and stress. Those people who have only known me since I started this program see me now, a few years later, and they see a bigger jump than just A to B. They watched a nervous, stressed out, frustrated student enter and now they look incredulously at me and see my confidence and joy. I am on the upswing attempting to even out my exuberance so that it does not spike and drop in the future.

From the challenges in the previous stages to this stage, the graduate student knows there is only one more test of stamina. Not to minimize its magnitude, but the end is in sight. Still, there seem to be so many balls to juggle in the air: a full-time job in another city, expectations of various faculty, and the multiple visions, requests, and revisions from the dissertation committee members. Despite the seemingly insurmountable challenge left, there is a sense of knowing that keeps the vision in sight. If it is possible, then the realization of the transformation, completion of the doctorate, and advancement to a career of purpose is a reward that will be savored. The hurdles before the dissertation seem like miniature hills, all the while the looming peaks of Mount Everest towers in the distance. It seems too tall to climb. At resting stations along the way life beckons you to return home. You might look back to your world before graduate school, where everything was simpler, has to be better than enduring another mile of the nearly impossible, treacherous journey.

After all, what is the role of education? It is to advance the citizenry to the next intellectual and career level. It is to train individuals for intellectual challenge, to add to the body of research, to provide professionals for the workforce, for social responsibility, or to train subject matter experts, or all of the above? If our goal is to train people in professional or

technical jobs, then do we really do that in the classes taught at our universities? If we are training people for civic engagement and social responsibility, do we have a responsibility to lead students down this path?

### **Closing the Final Loop**

Stage IV, Completion and Advancement, is the last frontier. Students confront reward and purpose with unresolved commitment. By this point, they have progressed down the graduate school trail. They are now steeped in the consequences of life management, faculty impact, and relationships. Enduring long years of trial by fire, they have survived the frustrations of the elements. Their journey may seem tiresome and elusive. Students sometimes reach the end of their rope and exclaim, “There are also frustrations, like, ‘Oh my God, it is a Communist plot! These people are trying to stop me from doing cool research and getting my degree!’”

At this point, many graduate students declare that the more they progress and learn, the more they do not know. The question arises, “Is this a reward?” Students interviewed said, “Do I even want to do this?” Another student exclaimed, “Why would any room full of people put themselves through this?” One question for contemplation might be, “Do I still want to teach or become an administrator?” This last question may not be resolved until the student finally graduates or quits.

It is logical that if students become highly emotional in one way or another, it might influence whether or not they complete their degree, advance in their career, and achieve their ultimate purpose in life. Thus, happy students who are positive and optimistic might drive or lead them to graduation and a successful future. Emotions are integral to the entire experience and they affect personal, professional, and faculty relationships. This, in turn, affects progress and advancement. For those students who are frustrated, afraid, and stressed, they might find that

their emotion causes tension in their relationships. The desire for faculty to help students filled with anxiety might be diminished. This might, in turn, cause other relationships to suffer as represented by the arrow from faculty to relationships in the system. In this system Emotion is positioned in a loop related to completion, Reward/Purpose, and Career Advancement. Those students who are happy, positive, and excited about their future are likely to advance their career, obtain their reward, and achieve their sense of purpose. On the other hand, those students who sense and display negative emotions may not finish because they may not be able to reach candidacy, complete their research, and get a committee of faculty members together who will approve their dissertation. Thus, they may have a difficult time in reaching their ultimate goal because of their emotional state.

The thesis/dissertation is the quintessential goal. The highest mountain a graduate student will climb rests in this one all-important document. It is akin to traversing a mountain with jagged edges. The ascent must be taken with extraordinary due diligence. Attention to detail is required for each form, signature, or step toward approval, recognition, and accomplishment. Every individual's experience is unique, but many shared similarities. The complexity of the bureaucracy and overwhelming nature of conducting original research is burdensome. Yet, all one needs to do is look around. Everyone else is struggling too. Yet, no matter how ominous it appears, it is surmountable. Students in this study said, "I can endure the 'how' if I have a 'why'." The dilemma in this loop is there continues to be real and lost opportunity costs and those costs keep mounting. Emotion emerges, but students press forward amid glimpses of joy and excitement, they trudge through the aggravation, isolation, and intimidation of the grueling climb to the precipice of glory. The dissertation is done. The signatures are obtained. Reward

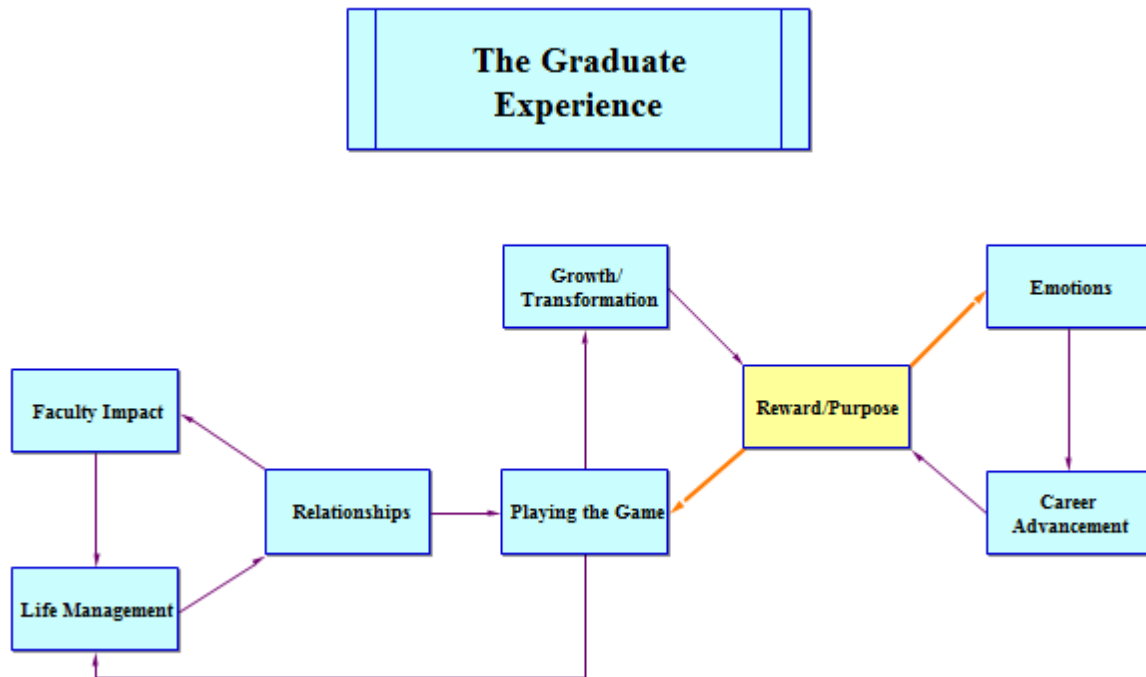
leads to an emotional outpouring of elation. Career advancement can be achieved; purpose is obtained. Thus, this feedback loop is resolved.

***The Graduate Experience – System Representation #6***

***Reward/Purpose Drives both Playing the Game and Emotions***

*“There are times when I really felt I have been on my own. Even though I have a chairman, he just sends me to other faculty members. I do not get answers to my questions. I cannot complain and I cannot get impatient with them or else they will not approve my defense. So, I just have to get impatient in my own corner, alone, with nobody to talk to about this. I work in isolation and, at times, that is very difficult.”*

Figure 5.19. Systems Influence Diagram – Reward/Purpose Outward Arrows



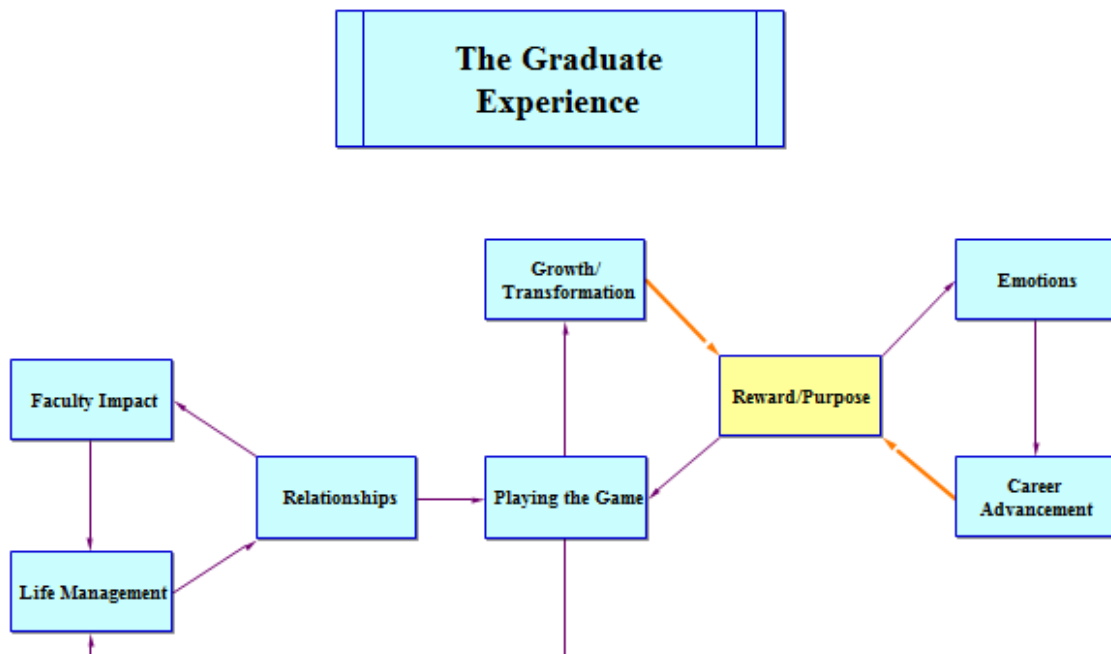
In this figure, Reward/Purpose drives Emotion and Reward/Purpose drives Playing the Game. One might ask, how could one's reward lead that person to the affinity, Playing the Game. It may be that the individual cannot get the reward or that it is elusive without following another set of rules and feeling that they are caught in a bureaucratic maze. If the reward remains just out of reach, then the reward would also present considerable frustration. Another explanation is that problems during the thesis/dissertation phase could result in conflict, which might explain both arrows going out from Reward/Purpose. "In some fields, they typically find out only at the dissertation stage what a major portion of their lives as professional researchers will entail: significant time spent in isolation, long-term and sometimes uncertain rewards, and

the painstaking revision of countless drafts” (Ehrenberg & Kuh, 2009, p. 37). The sadness from this revelation may be overwhelming. On the other hand, the idea that Reward/Purpose leads students to learn the rules of the game and continue to work on themselves and grow in order to be better prepared to submit a thesis/dissertation is not surprising. It is also very possible that, in the last loop, the Reward/Purpose leads to the positive emotions of elation and happiness. Therefore, when the graduate student is done, the result would lead to Career Advancement.

**Figure 5.20: Systems Influence Diagram – Reward/Purpose Inward Arrows**

The Graduate Experience – System Representation #7

Both Growth/Transformation and Career Advancement Drive Reward/Purpose



In this figure, Career Advancement leads to a student's greater sense of Reward and Purpose. Thus, by obtaining the graduate degree and achieving career goals the student experiences greater fulfillment. Through this they may realize their sense of purpose in life. One student said, "If I am able to use my Ph.D. to get into a new career, I would feel like I had been rewarded for all six years of this effort."

Growth and Transformation also offers the graduate student a sense of achievement. According to one interviewee, "My purpose is more well-defined and I have developed a deep sense of self-satisfaction. For me, growth is very important. If I am not growing, then I am not getting my reward." Growth in and of itself is a reward because it offers stimulation and the chance to see farther. Isaac Newton once said, "If I can see so far, it is because I stand on the shoulders of giants." In graduate school, the giants are faculty, imbued with scholarly wisdom. Graduate students drink from this fountain of knowledge, grow and transform, and often feel that they have fulfilled a higher purpose.

Comparison of the Graduate Experience Model to the Model Developed by Northcutt and McCoy (2004)

This updated study is more robust than the model previously presented in 2004 and is the most exhaustive to date. Continued investigation by the researcher with additional individual interviews, including those conducted at other research institutions, will provide additional information over time.

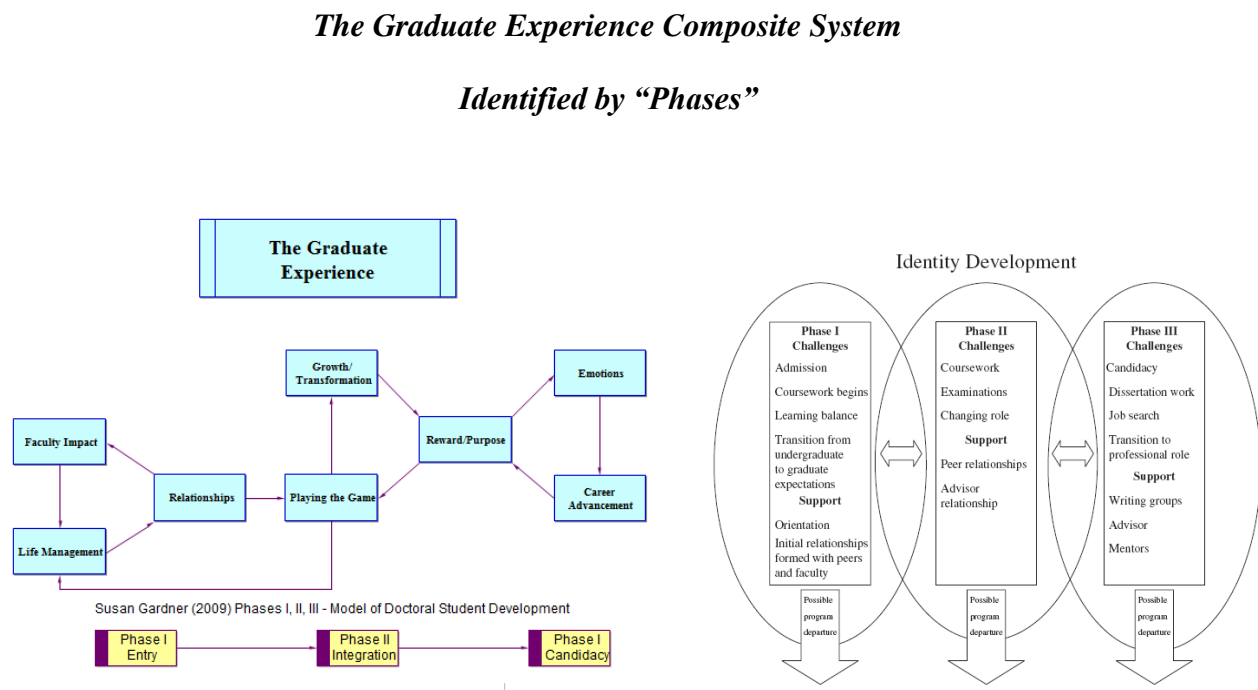


### **Comparison to Previously Developed Research Model for Doctoral Education**

When *The Graduate Experience* model developed in this research study is matched to the model presented in the ASHE Higher Education Report written by Susan Gardner (2009) some similarities exist. Gardner's model, entitled, "Identity Development", shows three clear phases: entry, integration, and candidacy. This is closely related to the first feedback loop identified in this study which includes Faculty Impact, Life Management, and Relationships. During the Phase I stage, students enter, meet their advisors, start their coursework, begin the socialization process, and balance family, social, and personal life.

Graduate students in this study identified that, even before orientation, in researching their desired program they developed a basic understanding of the requirements. This pre-embarkation period helped to open the door. Gardner's Phase I (Entry), thus begins before they start on the road to their graduate experience. One interviewee in this study said, "When I visited and met the faculty members in the program I was inspired." In this study, getting to know faculty is the student's entry to *The Graduate Experience*. A diagram of the Four Stage, Systems-Based Model of Graduate Student Transformation on the left is matched with Susan Gardner's Model of Doctoral Student Development on the right in the figure below.

**Figure 5.21. Comparison of the Graduate Experience System to Susan Gardner’s Phase I, II, and III or Identity Development**



The second loop in this system includes Playing the Game, Growth/Transformation, and Reward/Purpose. This closely matches Phase II of Gardner’s conceptual framework. Finally, the research in this study produced a final feedback loop that included Reward/Purpose, Emotions, and Career Advancement, very similar to Phase III of Gardner’s study.

One question that arises in contemplating student success is, “Does it make sense to approach this complex personal, social, and economic dilemma in a way that generalizes all students or even generalizes them in subgroups?” While it may be difficult to tease out all variations of the complex lives of individuals, there are some overarching recommendations that may be valuable to improve graduate student persistence and success and to add to and improve

upon a number of good practices already in place. Many universities have motivated and talented deans and department chairs who have incorporated some of these recommendations.

### Ten Recommendations

1. Recruitment, Selection, and Admissions – Student success in graduate school begins with attracting the best, brightest, and most diverse talent pool. From the graduate school’s perspective, this means inviting those who have the academic preparation, interpersonal skills, collaborative demeanor, and ability to thrive and survive. From the student’s perspective, the department’s website is usually a student’s first introduction to the depth and breadth of opportunities available. Colleges should:
  - a. Offer paid travel expenses to the top qualified candidates and Skype interviews to those who cannot come.
  - b. Recruit broadly, including students from a broad range of backgrounds.
  - c. Hire a diversity coordinator who works with unrepresented populations such as Hispanic, African American, American Indian, and other groups.
  - d. Invite prospective college juniors and seniors to an on campus colloquium program that introduces faculty and student research to these candidates.
  - e. Fully fund all doctoral students and help master’s candidates to find funding.
  - f. Develop a peer mentoring or buddy system so that incoming students feel welcome, informed, and prepared.
  - g. Develop an inviting, innovative, informative department website.
2. Interactive Department Website – Surprisingly few departments within universities have websites that are updated each month with student and faculty papers, video

introductions, video lectures, easily accessible blogs, lists of upcoming conferences, requests for journal submissions, job boards, guest seminars, and training opportunities for their students. Circuitous pathways through the university website can get a student to targeted information, but the student needs to be persistent in obtaining that information in order to find it. If a graduate student was hired to update the department's website, input a weekly blog post, post the department's current events, highlight successes of faculty and students, then current students, staff, faculty, alumni, and other interested parties could always remain in touch. Alumni, recruiters, and associations could then let the designated web content developer know about jobs, papers, conferences, projects, internships, scholarships, and other options for their students. For those faculty who say that nobody cares or it is too much of a bother, they need to step outside of the university to see how technologically in-tune students are today.

3. Full Financial Support – Financial support is linked to completion and attrition (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Nettles & Millett, 2006; Stratton, O'Toole, and Wetzel, 2005) Healthcare, child care, tuition, and books could be part of this financial package. Students with financial resources tend to have higher completion rates and shorter time-to-degree in their respective field and department (CGS, 2010). Like a commune utilizes all members for specific functions and everyone participates in making the community work, graduate students should be given the opportunity to fully immerse themselves into the culture, teaching, research, and project development. This improves social integration as well (Gardner & Barnes, 2007). This should not be a requirement for those who hold a full-time job or are not interested in working in the department or university, but the opportunity should be available. By spending the additional time at the university,

students are aware of requirements and are able to more easily facilitate the completion of bureaucratic details. If the university is unable to fund the students, a liaison should be available who can help students apply for grants and other external funds. Summer research grants and conference travel support should be provided for all doctoral students, but if not, certainly for master's and doctoral students those who have a paper, presentation, roundtable or poster session.

4. Stage-appropriate boot camps should be offered. These can provide short term, intense, organized training to orient, train, and guide students. In one packed week, students can be spared hundreds of lonely hours in isolation trying to find their way through a cloud shrouded thicket of rules and requirements with no compass. One-week intensive training programs should be offered each year for orientation, bureaucracy, requirements, internship/fellowship, grant-writing, oral/written examinations, doctoral dissertation planning and development.
5. Graduate Student Counseling, Mentoring, Assessment, and Advising – Either peer coordinated, faculty developed, or conducted by professional counseling staff, support groups or individual counseling could be provided for students who cannot find equilibrium while confronting the elements in each of the four stages. In this way, counselors or support groups can point the way through the obstacles and toward the next stage in the process. Continual feedback, advice, and support should link mentors/advisors to graduate students. Information about grants, papers, presentations, and how to get materials submitted should be part of this coaching process. Faculty mentors should provide support and feedback to students about one or more of the following: how they are progressing, what rules need to be followed, what roles need to

be respected, what behaviors should be modified, what action steps must be taken, how to become more fully integrated into the department, what expectations lay ahead, and how to contribute more to the department. Mentor training programs, print materials, and strategies should be available to both faculty and students. MentorNet is another option for outside mentoring.

6. Dissertation Fellows - Employ doctoral students who have recently completed their doctorate and are in transition to mentor graduate students through the dissertation process. They can serve as coaches to ensure that students in the department know where to go, what to do and have an organized process of completion and encouragement. There can be a bridge-year between the student finishing their doctorate and looking for jobs or postdoctoral positions in which they work for the university reading dissertations and helping students complete the dissertation process.
7. Gender, Ethnicity, Nationality, Age Diversity – Our society’s changing demographics combined with the global flattening of our planet dictates that we reassess how we choose, acculturate, mentor, and support our incoming students. Furthermore, when we do encourage underrepresented students to enter, there remains an extraordinary gap in the diversity between those who are hired to tenure track positions. Thus, future employment is limited (Ehrenberg & Kuh, 2009; National Research Council, 2001). In STEM fields, entering doctoral candidates typically come from a small age and ethnic demographic. Women have made inroads, but only slightly better than underrepresented minorities, who drop out at a higher rate, even if they take the requisite courses. They often cite racial isolation and feelings of being underprepared (Ehrenberg & Kuh, 2009).

8. Socialization Opportunities – With the placement of Relationships towards the beginning of the system and the need to understand the rules and requirements of the university in Playing the Game, opportunities to get to know other students outside of class is important. This can take place through cohort programs, team research projects, creation of a graduate student lounge, access to office space with mailboxes, and coordinated professional development opportunities.
9. Emeritus Faculty Mentor Opportunities – With the increasing longevity of individuals coupled with early detection and prevention of health complications, people are living longer and healthier lives. Faculty should be given the option to retire, but still serve as an advisor and mentor in flexible assignments, remain current with the literature, and share their networks and associations. In this way, they may remain connected, but still be able to enjoy outside life interests. Although not on salary, perquisites might include health benefits, paid conference travel for bringing a group of students, presenting a new paper, and/or shared office space with other emeriti faculty. This would allow these dedicated intellectuals to mentor, advise, assist graduate students, introduce students to their network of academics at conferences, serve on dissertation committees, and invite them to remain a part of the academy.
10. Global Research Initiative – Universities should take the lead in building bridges with scientists and researchers from around the world through new communications media and video website-enhanced exchange of ideas. In this endeavor, they should create nation-building opportunities and diplomatic channels to share information, ideas, and technology. Universities can proactively develop strategic partnerships with companies and organizations that will train students in their facilities and hire future graduates.

Within the university environment, limits on technology create barriers; an osmotic filter with no porous flow is only an obstruction. In this age of technology, ideas should flow with alacrity. If the information and education individuals in other countries desire is in the United States, people will continue to master English and come to America's institutions to learn from our scholars. But, if we are exclusionist and do not adapt to the evolving technology with vodcasts, YouTube discussions, open source content, interactive multimedia, and streaming information, we will be eclipsed by those who have witnessed the viral revolution of web-disseminated information.

#### Ten Future Studies to Consider

1. This study derived nearly all of its data from doctoral students who were typically halfway through their program and not yet in the dissertation stage. Would this system be different if the interviewees were nearing or had reached candidacy or had just finished their doctorate? In other words might the procedural requirements in preparing the dissertation cause the Ph.D. candidate to think that Playing the Game has a greater impact or might there be a feedback loop that returned to Faculty Impact or might Emotions have a more prominent or interconnected placement?
2. Do the experiences of graduate students vary from discipline to discipline? Is the experience different based upon gender, ethnicity, or nationality? How about family and personal experiences like age, work experience, young children in the home, and finances? How would the system representations of these be different?



3. What are the differences between M.A. and Ph.D. student experiences and there associated system-representations versus professional programs such as M.B.A., D.D.S., M.D.? How about B.A. and community college students?
4. What happened to those students who have not finished the Ph.D.? What percent drop out at each stage and why? Is there a difference between those students who are ABD and return to finish their Ph.D. compared to the traditional Ph.D. students?
5. What effect does the culture in the graduate school predict attrition? How much does overall graduate school leadership, vision, financial resources, and support for faculty from the Office of the Dean determine student persistence and graduation?
6. What role has the changing use of technology played on pedagogy, advising, writing, and communication, particularly in classroom engagement, distance learning? Is there a gap in technology use between graduate students and their sometimes older faculty members and does this make a difference in graduate student success?
7. How can students who have young children in the home be better supported in graduate school while remaining closely tied to home, family, and children?
8. Since some universities have deadlines for completing graduate degree within a certain number of years, what happens to those who stop out in the process and want to return when they are ready and more determined? Should there be an option for re-admittance?
9. Are cohort programs effective? Is there another model of socialization that may be more effective? Could a peer mentor system work in which graduate students who have been through the ropes support those who are coming up the ranks?
10. The majority of studies on graduate education are focused on tier 1 research universities. What is the system representation of graduate students from for-profit universities? What

is the impact of the large numbers graduate degree earners from for-profit schools? Will they be embraced by academia or will they be marginalized? Will people who earned degrees from those schools be required to get another Ph.D. from a tier 1 research institution in order to be a part of academe? Can higher education institutions simply ignore those students, particularly if their numbers gain a critical mass? If they are not ‘invited to the party’, considered for research positions, or given a chance at postdoctoral positions, is there a rite of passage students they can undergo that may allow them to be accepted? What about the faculty at these institutions? Will the research from for-profit universities be accepted? Will these faculty have compromised the possibilities for their future by their faculty position?

### Ten Final Thoughts

All of these aspects are important: recruitment, selection, orientation, counseling, crisis management, educating faculty, establishing boards to oversee processes, collaborating with corporate partners, creating student learning communities, inviting alumni panels to contribute ideas, getting feedback and input on best practices and needs in the field, and going the extra mile to ensure that every incoming graduate student makes it through the process and achieves the expectations of the graduate school. Some graduate students will not complete their program for reasons beyond everyone’s control, such as health, mortality, incapacity as a result of health issues, and unresolved family crises. However,

1. Poor recruitment and selection of students should not be a reason for failure. The cost of educating graduate students in terms of administrative, faculty, and student time and money is significant. The loss of talent is just as disturbing. All students should be

screened in person or via Skype and not just left to a paper screening. If an applicant cannot locate a public or private computer to access a free Skype connection for an interview, this is a sure sign that they will not be able to overcome the much more significant hurdles of graduate school.

2. Lack of money for tuition, books, food, shelter, and access to technology should not be a reason for failure. Graduate students chosen through the admissions process are presumed to be the best and brightest from the pool. If they are not worth funding for their research or teaching skills, then they should not be selected, even if this means having a smaller incoming cohort. This means that all students should be offered the chance to teach, research, tutor, coach, train, support, or perform some other valuable function in exchange for tuition and expenses. They can choose to turn this down, but they should have a chance to be an integral part of the university system. The Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate advocates for an intentional apprenticeship in the academic community (Golde, Bueschel, Jones, & Walker, 2009) to implemented in graduate institutions.
3. Anxiety, fear, frustration, stress, and academic trauma should not be reasons for failure, except as a last resort because the student is unwilling to finish and unwilling to accept help. Even then, encouragement, support, and intervention can make a difference at a critical time when just an ounce of positive reinforcement can go a very long way.
4. Faculty power is pervasive throughout the graduate student experience. Faculty advisor-advisee relationships are essential. All graduate students school should have a mentor throughout their experience, although 31 percent do not say they have one (Nettles and Millett, 2006). This should not be a reason for student failure.

5. Great faculty should be recognized and rewarded. Their enthusiasm can illuminate a classroom with passion and commitment. That inspiration can turn around any disenchanted or exhausted student. This is not to downgrade research, teaching, or other contributions to the university, but to acknowledge that great contributions should be aspired to by faculty and recognized by administrators so that a safe, permanent, and guaranteed asylum is not granted to those who cease to play an integral part on any front. That said, supercharged faculty who give 100% of themselves are at great risk of burnout. These high performers need rest and relaxation and other perquisites that provide the added recognition for a prized job that is well-executed. One 'hidden' reward that would help valued faculty is the reality of good policies and procedures set in place to ensure that they and their fellow faculty are clear about job expectations. Yet, we should also acknowledge that faculty are mortals. They are set up in academe as superstars. Faculty, too, have relationship conflicts, personality disorders, mid-life crises, stresses of all kinds that sometimes lead to inappropriate behaviors; they sometimes stop out or drop out and, in the very worst cases, conduct themselves in ways that are extremely harmful to their best interests. Surely, suicide among faculty is not unknown. Probably, they do not get counseling themselves and must realize that they are, in fact, human.
6. Faculty behaviors should not be reasons for failure. Although this issue stems from institutional socialization processes and professional reward structure, strategies and information can help faculty become better advisors, mentors, and teachers. While it is true that professional development funds continue to evaporate in this desert climate of austerity, if public funds are not available to encourage continued growth, private funding should be sought. The price tag is small relative to the value of the reinvigoration of an

overworked, often disempowered lot, who are shown in this study's system influenced diagrams to be the driving force of student success. Graduate assistant support for faculty can be funded by alumni donations, college funds, or organizational sponsorships for course development to produce better handouts or create PowerPoint presentations, upload podcasts, and send out Twitter or other communiqués. If after providing all feasible support, faculty cannot or are not willing to improve, serve their students, communicate effectively, develop better teaching methods, or provide the advising/mentoring support while doing research, they should be taken out of the loop until they are willing to accept faculty development – tenured or not. But, to water down higher education and demand more, expect more, and disempower faculty, neither the faculty nor the students will succeed. Ultimately, universities will fail in their mission. An empowered and enlightened faculty inspire interested students.

7. Continuous improvement programs should be established, if they are not already in place, in order to better understand what is working and where breakdowns are occurring in the system. These types of programs are in place in industry and should be a standard in education, like Total Quality Management.
8. Case study models should be created for individual, department, or administrative various types of dysfunctions within universities. Professional development programs can analyze these to offer models or solutions for each occurrence and reflect upon the implementation of similar models to situations in his or her own department. This is done in most well-managed enterprises and can be done in the halls of academia, where models should inform industry rather than industry informing academe. This is not to lay blame, because we do not have the time, nor the need to blame.

9. Higher education should take the lead, develop models, and provide solutions for their own internal questions of leadership, management, broken systems, and failure to successfully graduate their students. Corrective measures should be implemented to fix problems so that failure is not repeated. The cost of repeated failures, large or small, is too great.
10. The National Research Council (2010) found that “The majority of students in five fields surveyed for the report – chemical engineering, physics, neuroscience, economics, and English – were ‘very satisfied’ or ‘somewhat satisfied’ with the quality of their program. Over 60% in most fields felt they benefited from the program’s intellectual environment, but only 40% or less were satisfied with the program-sponsored social interaction” (p. 4). If 40% do not feel they are benefitting from the intellectual environment and 60% were not satisfied with the program-sponsored social interaction, more research and program development must be done in these areas. Intellectual stimulation should be the core of what students receive. Opportunities to write, analyze, present, and watch speakers should be available. The system generated from this study and information regarding the transformational impacts of these four stages may reveal clues to aid graduate schools in their ability to infuse socialization, intellectual development, and immersion into his or her research as well as that conducted by those in his or her field.

## Conclusion

This dissertation presents the graduate student experience. Graduate students themselves provided moving testimonies of the glory and agony of devoting a significant part of their life working toward their graduate degree. Their revelations describe the gamut of life experiences.

Many of these graduate students will return the generosity of faculty who supported them to future graduate students when they themselves re-enter academia's halls from the faculty door. In this new role as advisors and mentors, they will support incoming students through their voyage of discovery as they were guided themselves through their transformation.

The first few chapters make it abundantly evident that there are important questions that beg for answers regarding the improvement of education, understanding of human behavior, need for socialization, importance of having financial resources, and the key aspects of family and friends along the way. Academic and organizational researchers continue to study facets of graduate education. The Council of Graduate Schools completed their seminal study called the Ph.D. Completion Project with an extraordinarily large set of data and excellent recommendations. Phase I covered twelve years of data in "330 programs and 49,113 students in 62 disciplines" (Council of Graduate Schools, 2009, p. 3). Their 2010 publication, Policies and Practices to Promote Student Success, offers insights into: selection/admission processes, availability and quality of mentoring and advising, extent and adequacy of financial support, program environment, curricular processes and procedures, and research experiences. In another area, related to the STEM training of international students in U.S. graduate schools, a problem arises after student visas expire and these students must move back to their country of origin. In an effort to provide additional time for willing and interested students to work on U.S. projects, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement announced on May 12, 2011 that they have expanded their list of STEM graduates who could extend their student visas.

Written and verbal descriptions of human behavior and outcomes provided by the interviewees articulate the sometimes cumbersome undertaking of a graduate degree while keeping "different plates spinning at the same time." A few years into the experience, some

question whether it is even possible. Yet, each graduate student knows that many have traveled along this road in the past and many more will travel it in the future. That evidence tells each graduate student that it is possible; people have done it; it is just a matter of understanding yourself and working with others. Nietzsche once said, “I can endure any *how* if I have a *why*.” In the application for graduate admission, prospective students write a personal statement explaining *why*; their task ahead is enduring *how*. Achieving the goal and realizing the dream is not to be taken lightly, because it is tough work to acknowledge that sometimes *you* are the element that must change. Graduate students have a support team. Faculty scholars, researchers, advisors, and mentors have great wisdom and they can reveal secret passageways to assist their advisees and mentees along the road.

Objectively measured descriptions and systematically analyzed data in this study offer valuable insights presented both graphically and in the students’ own words. This data, accepted as factual substance from student experiences, provide a foundation for the quantitative distillation of information into systems influenced diagrams that present the flow of outcomes. The mathematical computation, using student interview data, removes the guesswork out of interpreting human meanings that drive behavior. The “IQA super-interview protocol” can be used to enhance our knowledge of various facets of the graduate school experience with additional interviews and targeted examination of subsets of graduate students.

This study quantifies outcomes that often elude our limited means of understanding complex and dynamic life circumstances. Generally, if one cannot immediately experience an event using their five ‘known’ senses, then it does not exist. Therefore, strict qualitative studies are often put in the category of ‘rational man’ behavior. The effort put forward in this study



places a thus far elusive subject through a rigorous framework in a means that many people can empathize with and understand.

The recommendations in this final chapter offer some tools to improve the graduate experience. On the other hand, it is important to admit, upfront, that most people populating this planet live in survival mode and sense their way through life. They survive graduate school or any other endeavor because it is in their nature to keep going through the motions, no matter how noble their original pursuit may have been or how powerful their current resolve to seek a greater purpose in life. Still, life flickers on and off in modes of rational pursuit, contemplative desire, and pragmatic day to day existence. Graduate students must eat, drink, sleep, and breathe. They are limited by money, time, and energy. Thus, they do what they can, often surmounting obstacles that surprise them along their educational journey. Still, the immediacy of an injured child, car accident, or computer failure, takes precedent. The individual can emote in the moment, but also know that this will not carry them to where we need to be. Graduate students handle what is necessary and proceed. There is the rub. As graduate students continue on their ‘yellow brick road’, they know the ‘Emerald City’ is in the distance, but there are ‘lions and tigers and bears’. Graduate students forego excitement and oftentimes relationships while they skip ahead toward their dream.

A graduate degree is more than a dream fulfilled; it is a significant mark of achievement held by less than ten percent of individuals in the United States (U.S. Census, 2010). The larger picture is significant too. Graduate research programs advance the state of our knowledge regarding the world in which we live and the dedication of faculty and students to that end. There are highs and lows, joys and frustrations, and a veritable roller coaster ride that is not for the fainthearted. This unending pursuit, riddled with hurdles and bureaucracy often makes one

question the reasonableness of this effort. However, only a few small words of encouragement from advisors and mentors go a long way in lifting the spirit when the flame dims and these few words stoke the fire for one more week, month, or year.

When graduate students stop to marvel at what they are like now versus what they were like when they started, particularly with respect to research and collaboration, it is clear to recognize that personal wisdom, interpersonal relationships, and academic knowledge are the keys. The consequences of not getting this right are too great; the costs are too high. Although efforts have been initiated, student persistence and transformation on all levels of higher education should be a national priority. To do that, though, means that we must envision and prognosticate where we want higher education to be and, ultimately, where we want our country to be in terms of original idea generation, preparation of future leaders, and global leadership in technology, energy, sustainability, and communications. The expanding number of universities worldwide seek to emulate our system of graduate schools, even as we seek to change. This increasing global competition for the top scholars to be trained at innovative research centers will map out a new future for graduate education with a flattening of disciplinary boundaries and strengthening of cross-cultural, interconnected approaches to problem solving. The prospects are daunting, yet exciting for students and faculty alike as university education transforms itself to embrace the changing global and technological landscape. After all, our ultimate goal is to have an energized, attentive, motivated, and engaged citizenry who can work together to empower our communities and open doors to the possibilities of the future.

#### APPENDIX

## Composite Interview Graduate Experience ART

<b>Affinity Name</b> 1. Career Advancement 2. Emotions 3. Faculty Impact 4. Growth/Transformation 5. Life Management 6. Playing the Game 7. Relationships 8. Reward/Purpose	<b>Possible Relationships</b> $A \rightarrow B$ $A \leftarrow B$ $A \leftrightarrow B$ (No Relationship)
---	---

AFFINITY RELATIONSHIP TABLE		
AFFINITY PAIR RELATIONSHIP		AFFINITY PAIR RELATIONSHIP
1 ← 2		3 → 6
1 ← 3		3 → 7
1 ← 4		3 → 8
1 ← 5		4 ← 5
1 ← 6		4 ← 6
1 ← 7		4 ← 7
1 ← 8		4 → 8
2 ← 3		5 → 6
2 ← 4		5 → 7
2 ← 5		5 → 8
2 ← 6		6 ← 7
2 ← 7		6 → 8
2 ← 8		7 → 8
3 → 4		
3 → 5		

Conflicts 83.3%

$1 \rightarrow 2$   
 $2 \rightarrow 4$

$4 \rightarrow 5$   
 $5 \leftarrow 6$

$5 \leftarrow 7$

Conflicts 89.5%

$1 \rightarrow 5$   
 $1 \rightarrow 8$   
 $2 \rightarrow 5$

$4 \rightarrow 6$   
 $4 \rightarrow 7$   
 $4 \leftarrow 8$

$6 \rightarrow 7$

Conflicts 95.3%

$1 \rightarrow 4$   
 $2 \rightarrow 6$

$2 \rightarrow 7$   
 $3 \leftarrow 6$

$5 \leftarrow 8$   
 $6 \leftarrow 8$

Conflicts 96.8%

$2 \rightarrow 3$

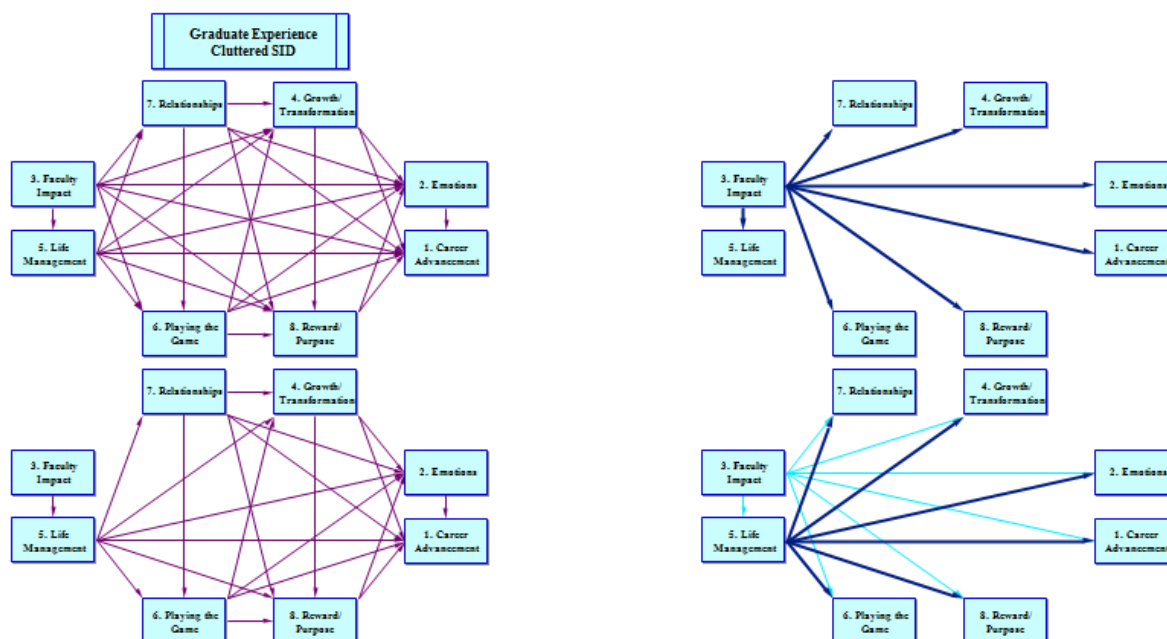
$3 \leftarrow 7$

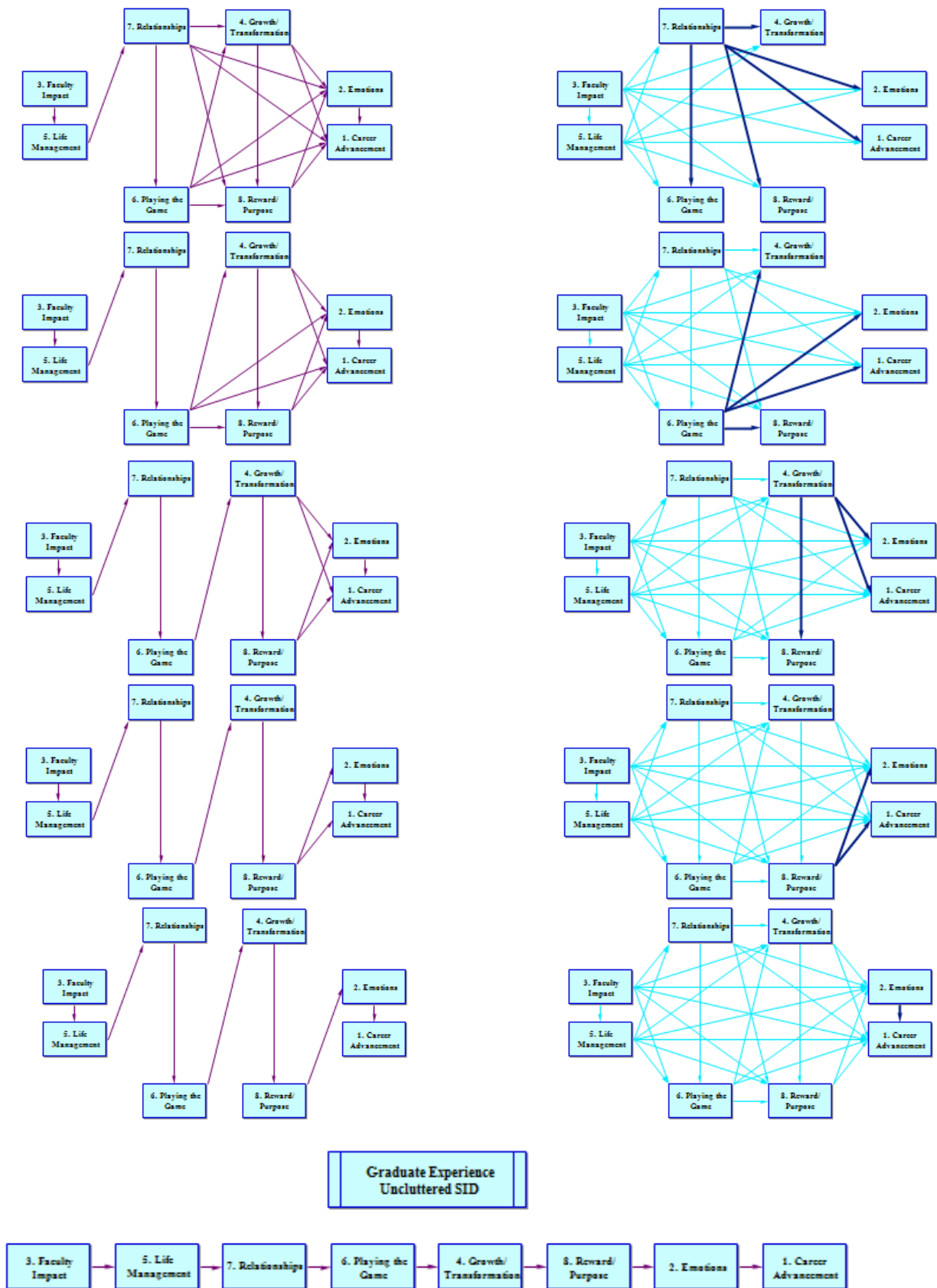
## Appendix #2 Graduate Experience Pareto

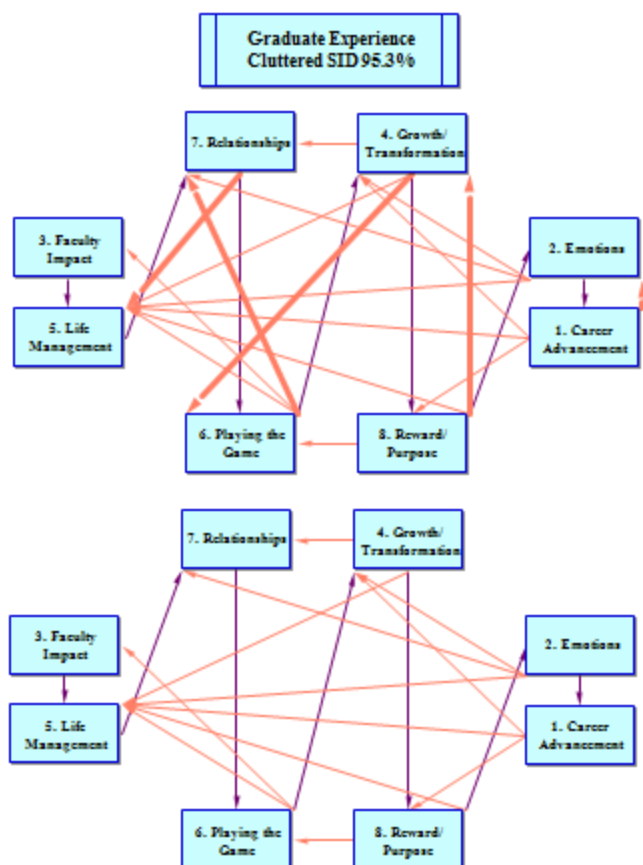
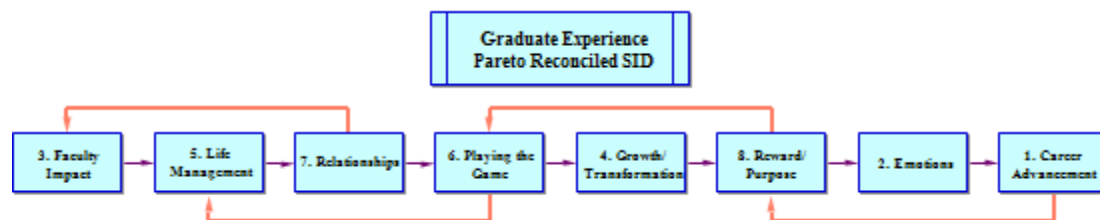
Affinity Pair Relationship	Frequency	Conflict?								Affinity Pair Relationship	Frequency	Conflict?
1 < 2	49	x	<b>Instructions:</b> Paste the two columns (A&B) from the Frequency Ordered sheet in the first two columns. Select columns A & B and sort Affinity Pair Relationship by ascending order.							1 < 3	89	
1 < 3	89									3 > 4	89	
1 < 4	68		Examine the affinity pair relationships for conflict. If both affinity pairs (ex. 1>2 and 1<2) are present, place a question mark in the conflict box.							1 < 6	87	
1 < 5	61	x								3 > 8	80	
1 < 6	87									1 < 7	78	
1 < 7	78									2 < 8	71	
1 < 8	52	x	Use all non-conflicting relationships to create your IRD. For conflicting relationships, use the highest frequency. Note the affinity pair and reconcile conflicting relationships in the SID.							2 < 3	70	
1 > 2	37	x								1 < 4	68	
2 < 3	70		Use all non-conflicting relationships to create your IRD. For conflicting relationships, use the highest frequency. Note the affinity pair and reconcile conflicting relationships in the SID.							2 < 7	68	x
2 < 4	46	x								3 > 6	68	
2 < 5	60	x								7 > 8	67	
2 < 6	64									4 < 7	65	x
2 < 7	68	x	Use all non-conflicting relationships to create your IRD. For conflicting relationships, use the highest frequency. Note the affinity pair and reconcile conflicting relationships in the SID.							4 > 8	65	x
2 < 8	71									2 < 6	64	
2 > 4	45	x	Use all non-conflicting relationships to create your IRD. For conflicting relationships, use the highest frequency. Note the affinity pair and reconcile conflicting relationships in the SID.							3 > 7	64	
3 > 4	89									5 > 8	64	x
3 > 5	54									1 < 5	61	x
3 > 6	68									2 < 5	60	x
3 > 7	64		Use all non-conflicting relationships to create your IRD. For conflicting relationships, use the highest frequency. Note the affinity pair and reconcile conflicting relationships in the SID.							6 > 8	58	x
3 > 8	80									3 > 5	54	
4 < 5	50	x	Use all non-conflicting relationships to create your IRD. For conflicting relationships, use the highest frequency. Note the affinity pair and reconcile conflicting relationships in the SID.							1 < 8	52	x
4 < 6	51	x								5 > 7	52	x
4 < 7	65	x								6 < 7	52	x
4 > 5	37	x								4 < 6	51	x
4 > 8	65	x	Use all non-conflicting relationships to create your IRD. For conflicting relationships, use the highest frequency. Note the affinity pair and reconcile conflicting relationships in the SID.							4 < 5	50	x
5 < 6	39	x								1 < 2	49	x
5 < 7	39	x	Use all non-conflicting relationships to create your IRD. For conflicting relationships, use the highest frequency. Note the affinity pair and reconcile conflicting relationships in the SID.							2 < 4	46	x
5 > 6	41	x								2 > 4	45	x
5 > 7	52	x								5 > 6	41	x
5 > 8	64	x								5 < 6	39	x
6 < 7	52	x	Use all non-conflicting relationships to create your IRD. For conflicting relationships, use the highest frequency. Note the affinity pair and reconcile conflicting relationships in the SID.							5 < 7	39	x
6 > 8	58	x								1 > 2	37	x
7 > 8	67		Use all non-conflicting relationships to create your IRD. For conflicting relationships, use the highest frequency. Note the affinity pair and reconcile conflicting relationships in the SID.							4 > 5	37	x
										1 > 8	36	x
								80.8%				

Comparison	Count	Percentage
6 > 7	33	x
2 > 5	29	x
4 > 6	29	x
1 > 5	28	x
4 < 8	28	x
4 > 7	28	89.5%
2 > 7	27	x
6 < 8	26	x
5 < 8	24	x
2 > 6	22	x
3 < 6	22	x
1 > 4	21	95.3%
2 > 3	19	x
3 < 7	19	96.8%
2 > 8	18	x
7 < 8	18	x
3 < 5	16	x
1 > 7	9	x
3 < 8	7	x
3 < 4	5	x
1 > 6	3	x
1 > 3	2	100.0%

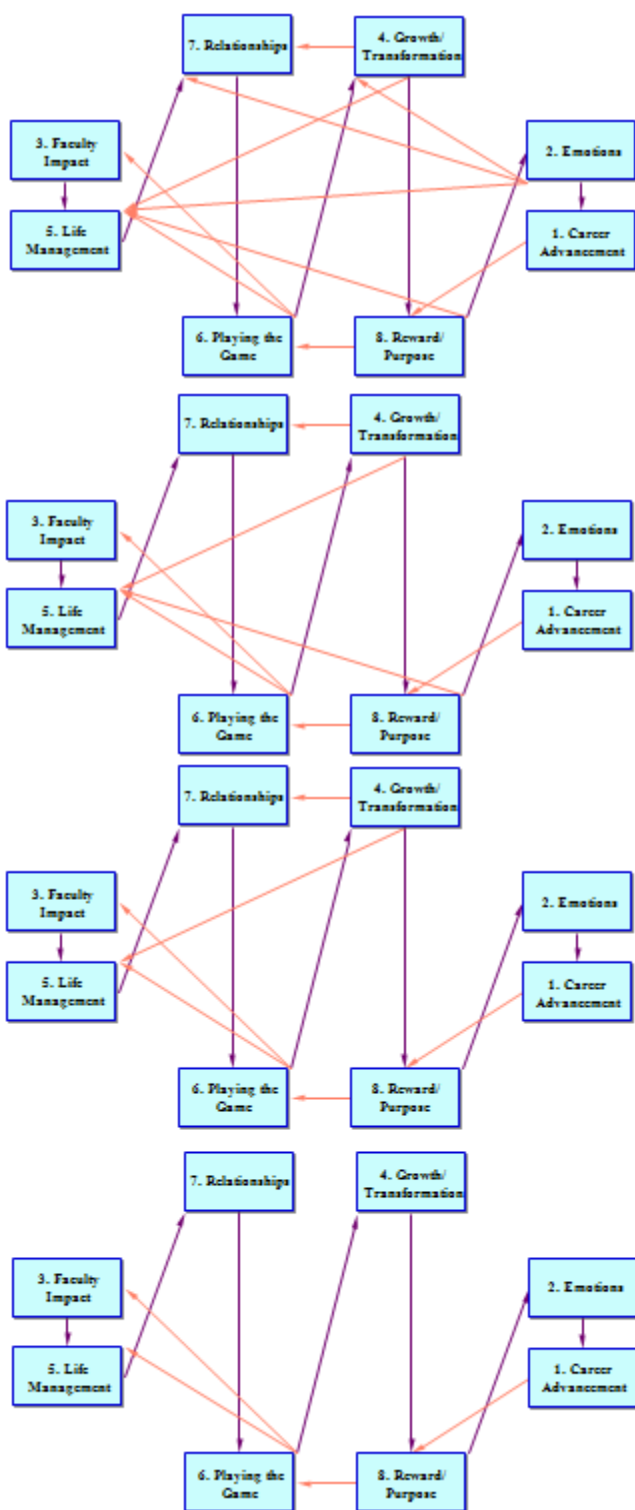
### Appendix #3 - The Graduate Experience Cluttered to Uncluttered SIDs

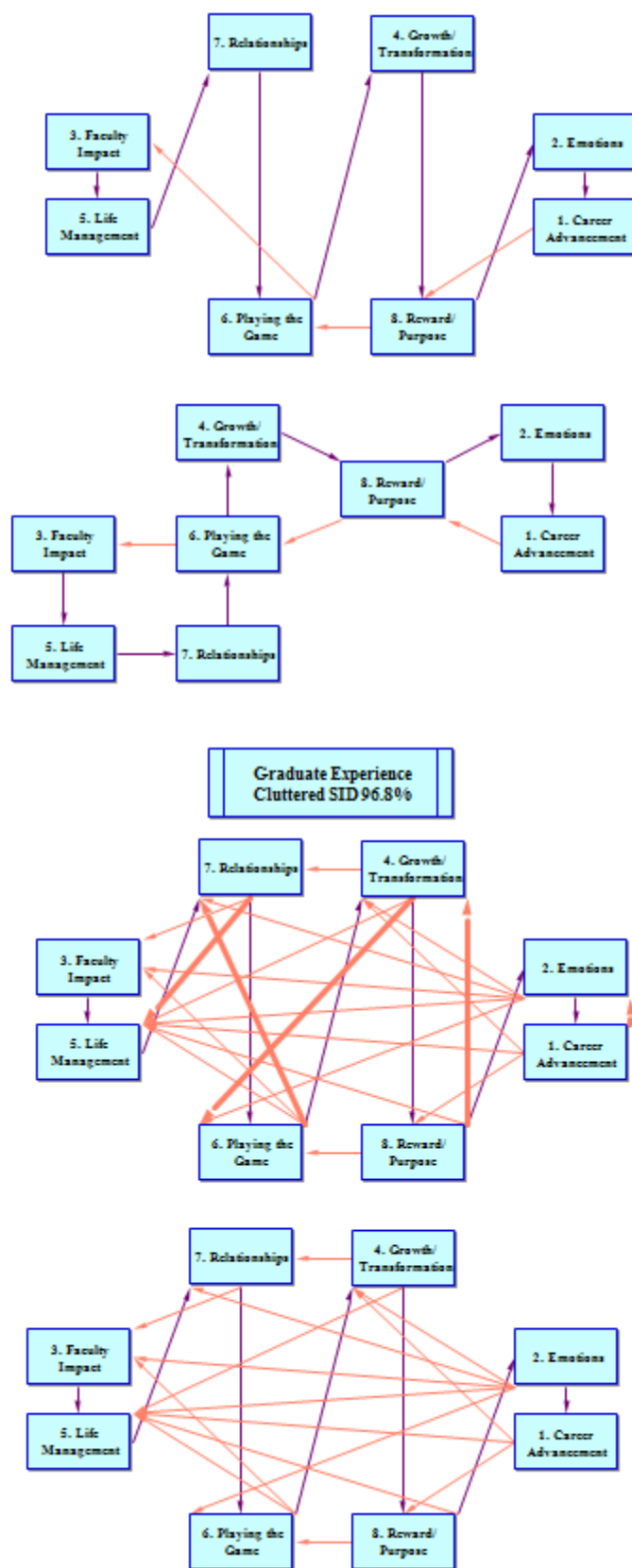


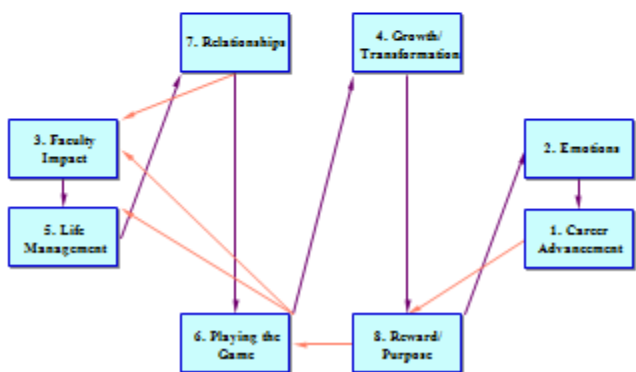
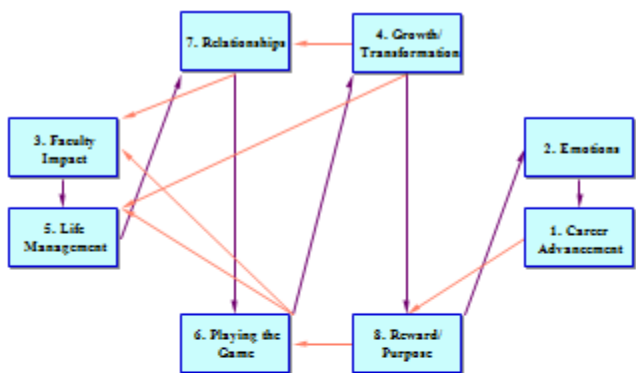
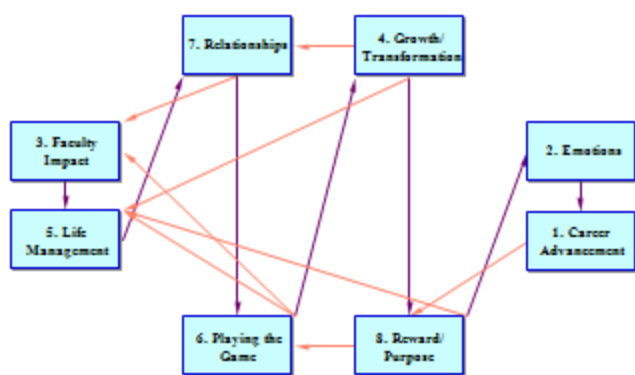
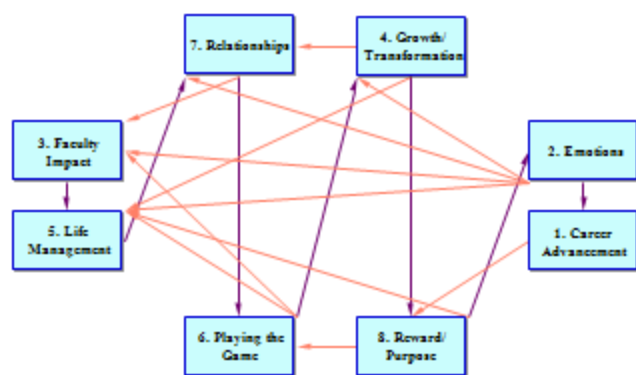


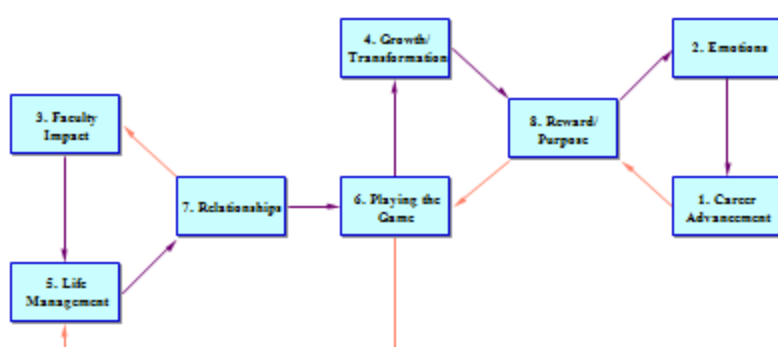
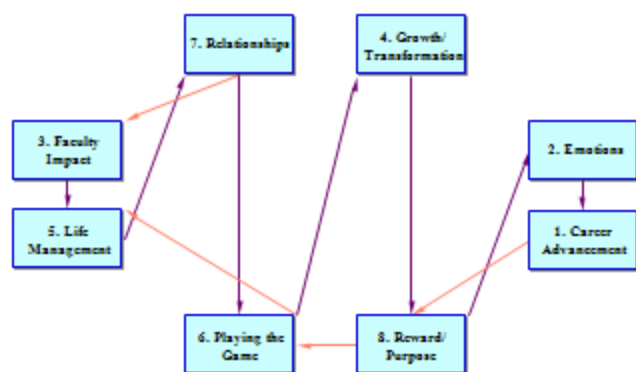


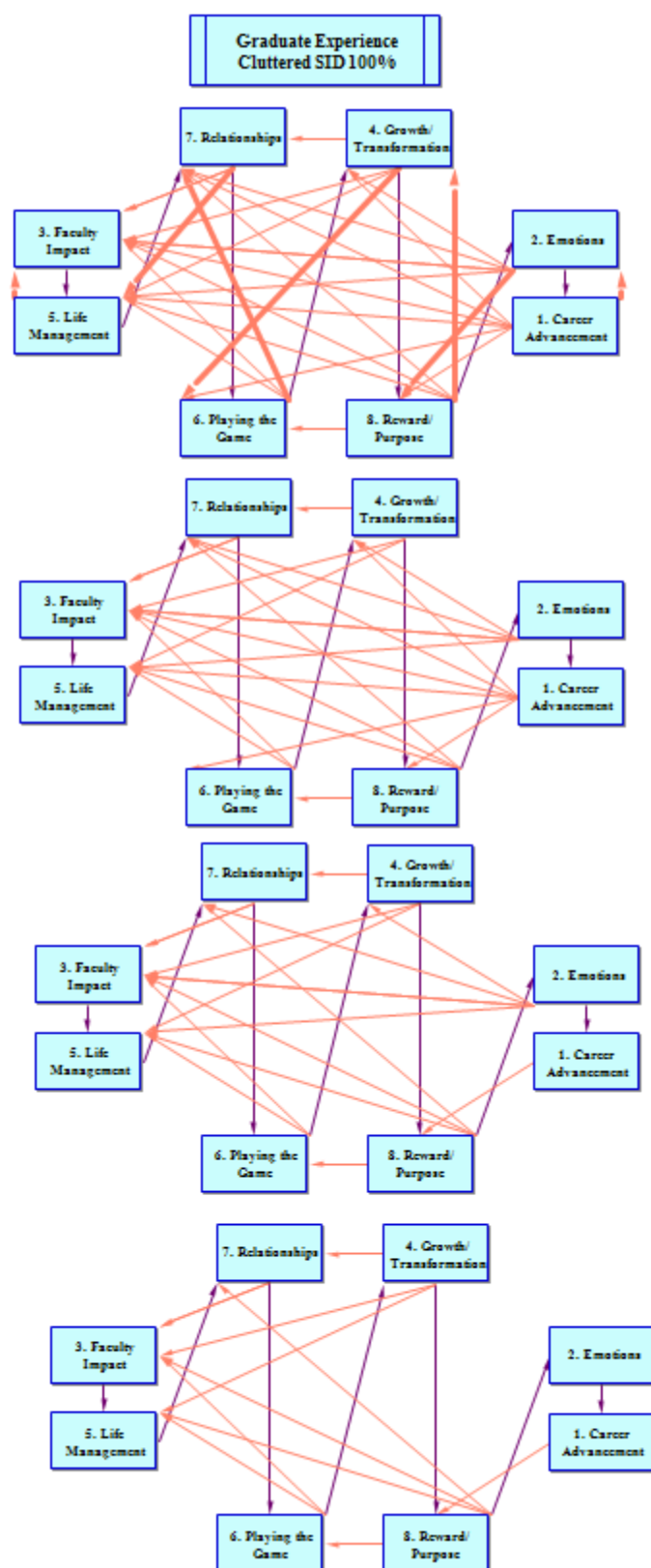


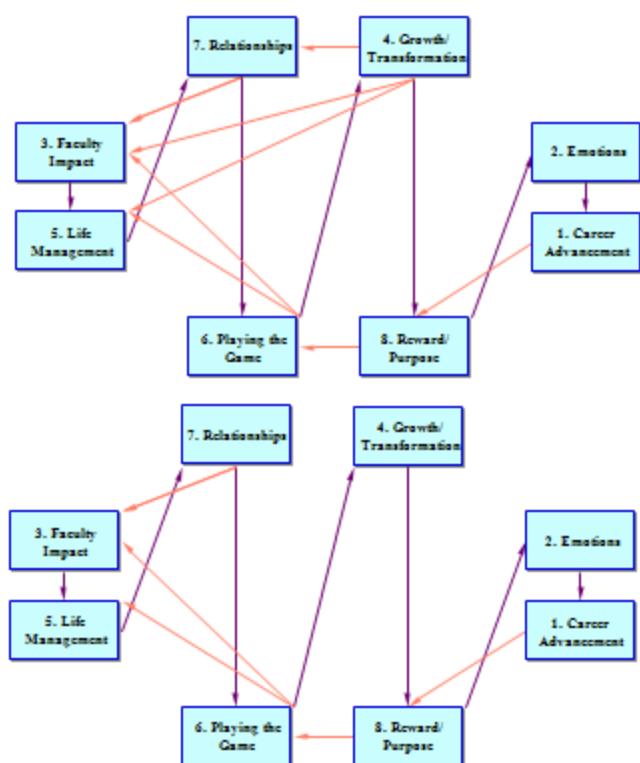












## Appendix #4 - Interactive Qualitative Analysis Description

The following was prepared and submitted by Dr. McCoy. He requested this to be used for the methodology section. Some of this is included within Chapter 3. The text provided below is what was sent to me.

### **History of This Study**

This study is a secondary analysis of unpublished data developed by Northcutt and McCoy.

While taking Northcutt and McCoy's IQA class, an offer was made to any student who wished to use the data developed by Northcutt and McCoy to provide a formal analysis and dissertation study. The researcher was provided all data developed by Northcutt and McCoy and was left to draw conclusions based on the data for this study. The following identifies the methods used to generate the data and the form in which it was provided to the researcher. IQA research flow has four distinct phases: Research Design, Focus Group, Interview, and Report (Results/Analysis and Interpretation/Implications). The researcher became involved in the forth phase.

### **Research Design**

In 2001, Northcutt and McCoy had developed the foundations of IQA, produced a draft textbook and began co-teaching a course on the IQA method. As part of the course design, students were to complete a mini dissertation as a final project. Northcutt and McCoy chose a subject that would be of interest to the students and would allow the students to participate in the process while using the IQA methods. Northcutt and McCoy chose the topic of the Graduate Experience since the students were very close to the phenomenon and would be open to discussing their

experiences. Using the IQA research design protocol, Northcutt and McCoy started with a general problem statement. They observed that completing graduate school is a difficult process and one that is experienced quite differently by students. Capturing the major elements of the graduate school from the student's point of view could very well lead to a better understanding of what makes for a successful graduate school experience. Northcutt and McCoy wanted to know 1) Why do students have different perceptions of graduate school? 2) Where do things go wrong? 3) What make the experience positive?

To address these questions Northcutt and McCoy identified the following General Research Questions:

1. What factors make up the students' perceptions of their experience in graduate school?
2. How do these factors relate to each other in a perceived system of influence or cause and effect?
3. How does the individual's experience compare to that of the group as a whole?
4. How do the two groups' experiences compare to each other?

The main purpose of Northcutt and McCoy's research was not a formal study but to apply a framework for students to be able to apply IQA methods in a practical situation and complete the study as a group with individual reports as the final project of the class. The four phases of IQA were applied each semester. After several years, Northcutt and McCoy began to realize they were accumulating a significant set of interviews and began offering the data to students for a formal report.



## Focus Groups

Northcutt and McCoy used the IQA Focus Group process to produce the affinities. Each semester while teaching the students how to perform a focus group, Northcutt and McCoy used the following Focus Group Warm-Up Exercise.

### Graduate Experience Focus Group Warm-up Exercise

I would like you to think for a while about life as a graduate student.

In a few minutes, I am going to ask you to tell me about your experience with being a graduate student.

So let's begin.

- Please allow yourself to be as comfortable as possible.
- Put your thoughts from the day aside to allow your attention to focus on this topic.
- Close your eyes to increase your state of relaxation and your ability to notice what you know about how you and others are powerful in their environment.
- Now imagine yourself in graduate school. (long pause)
- See yourself engaging in the activities of a student. (long pause)
- Notice your surroundings. (long pause) Looking around you, take in the sights, the sounds that are associated with being in school. (long pause)
- Allow yourself to become aware of your environment with all of your senses.
- Focus on what it feels like to be totally absorbed in the graduate school. Be there in your mind. (long pause)
- Review all your recollections up to this moment. (pause)
- Allow all these thoughts to remain calmly in your consciousness and ready to be revealed.

Thank you for allowing these valuable observations and recollections to come forward.

Please allow yourself to gently allow your consciousness back to this time and place and when you are ready, open your eyes.

Good. Thank you.

And now, with all that you remember—and that is all that you just noticed—please write down your thoughts on these cards.

Write one thought or experience per card. Feel free to record a word, a phrase, a sentence, or a picture to capture that thought . . . and  
. . . Tell me about the Graduate Experience.

Each semester produced a set of affinities. After several focus groups had been conducted, Northcutt and McCoy reconciled the affinity names and identified the eight affinities that make up the elements of the Graduate Experience System. Each subsequent semester, students participated as a focus group and each time the names identified were similar as Northcutt and McCoy's affinities and the cards generated easily fit within one of them.

Northcutt and McCoy also identified relationships between the affinities with the first few focus groups. Students were asked to produce a Theoretical Code Table based on the reconciled affinities. After several semesters of theoretical data was collected from the students a system was drawn. This system served as the Graduate Experience System to be used in the Interview Protocol as well as the final system to which students would use in their Analysis and Interpretation chapters of their final paper.

## **Interviews**

Once the affinities had been identified, Northcutt and McCoy developed an IQA Interview Protocol. Students would use the same protocol each semester. For the class on interviewing, students were instructed how to conduct an IQA Interview and were then assigned a fellow student to interview. Students interview each other and transcribe the interviews. The interviews

were cleaned up, formatted and any identifying information was to be removed. The student would then use the interview they conducted to build an individual mind map of their respondent and compared the individual to that of the group when students wrote their final papers. Below is the Graduate Student Interview Protocol.

## **The Graduate Experience Interview Protocol**

### **Axial Interview**

Focus groups have identified several common themes or affinities that describe their experiences in graduate school. Let's look at each of these themes one at a time and tell me about your experiences with these.

#### **1. Career Advancement**

Career Advancement describes as one of the reasons for attending graduate school. Tell me about career advancement.

#### **2. Emotions**

Emotions describes the reactions of students in graduate school.

#### **3. Faculty Impact**

Faculty Impact describes the student–faculty interaction. Tell me about faculty impact.

#### **4. Growth/Transformation**

Growth/Transformation reflects learning. Tell me about growth and transformation.

#### **5. Life Management**

Life Management describes the student life at home.

#### **6. Playing the Game**

Playing the Game describes the hurdles and the bureaucracy associated with graduate school. Tell me about playing the game.

#### **7. Relationships**

Relationships are interactions with peers, making friends, and connections. Tell me about the relationships.

#### **8. Reward/Purpose**

Reward and purpose is internal to the student. Examples may be pride or validation as a part of

the graduate experience. Tell me about reward and purpose.

### Theoretical Interview

Many of the themes or affinities identified have some kind of relationship; one effects or causes the other. Let's look at each theme and decide if or how it relates to each other theme. Tell me about your experiences with such relationships. Please give specific examples of how the relationships have affected your experience.

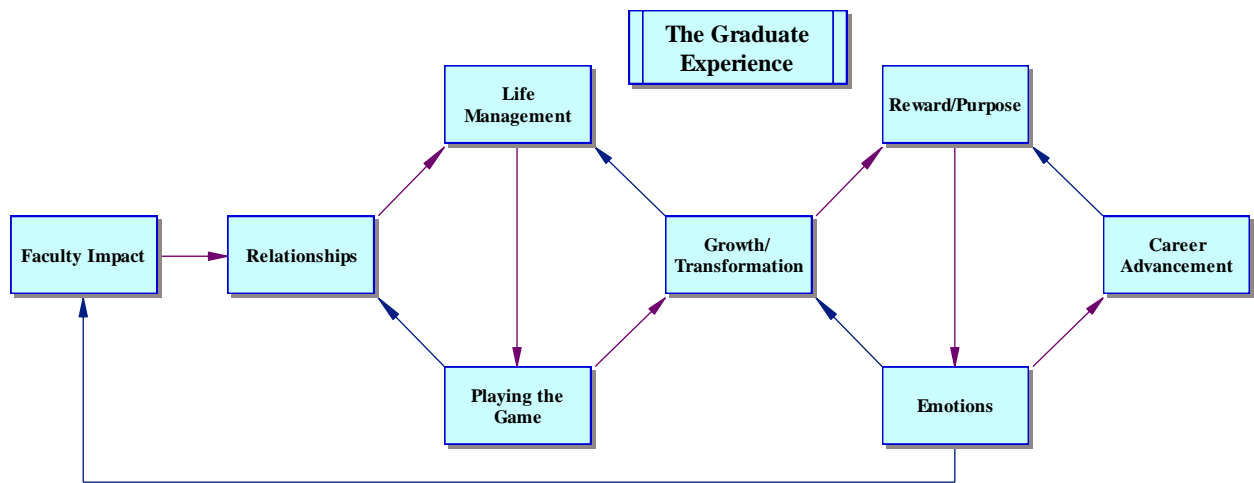
#### Affinity Name

- 9. Career Advancement
- 10. Emotions
- 11. Faculty Impact
- 12. Growth/Transformation
- 13. Life Management
- 14. Playing the Game
- 15. Relationships
- 16. Reward/Purpose

#### Possible Relationships

- $A \rightarrow B$
- $A \leftarrow B$
- $A \diamond B$  (No Relationship)

INTERVIEW AFFINITY RELATIONSHIP TABLE					
AFFINITY PAIR RELATIONSHIP			AFFINITY PAIR RELATIONSHIP		
1	2		3	6	
1	3		3	7	
1	4		3	8	
1	5		4	5	
1	6		4	6	
1	7		4	7	
1	8		4	8	
2	3		5	6	
2	4		5	7	
2	5		5	8	
2	6		6	7	
2	7		6	8	
2	8		7	8	
3	4				
3	5				



After several semesters, Northcutt and McCoy realized they had a significant set of interviews. They collected the interviews and assigned random interview numbers to each interview. From 2001 through May 2011 nearly 85 interviews were collected. Several poor quality interviews had been omitted from the collection over this course of time.

## Interview Analysis

Each semester, students were required to write a mini dissertation, to include Chapter 1: Introduction, Chapter 4; Analysis and Chapter 5: Interpretation. After several semesters Northcutt and McCoy developed Combined Axial and Combined Theoretical Coded Tables using Axial and Theoretical codes identified by students when they coded their interviews. These tables would serve as the basis for the Axial and Theoretical Write-ups

in Chapter 4. Students in small groups were assigned a single affinity to write up. Students examined the Axial Quotes and identified subaffinities and completed the subsequent Affinity Write-up. The same Combined Axial Coded Tables were used through out the history of the course. A Combined Theoretical Coded Table was produced early on and students one semester were assigned a Theoretical Write-up. This Theoretical Write-up was used in all future classes in its place in Chapter 4. Each semester, Northcutt and McCoy would collect the Affinity Write-ups by the individual groups. They would assemble them in a Chapter 4 format, completing the IQA method for Chapter 4. Students were then provided a copy of the chapter and would use the Affinity and Theoretical Write-ups as the basis of discussion in their own Chapter 5 interpretations of the system. Students were given the following guidelines for writing their Chapter 5:

## **V. Interpretation & Implications**

The implications section provides a forum for the researcher to analyze and interpret the data as well as draw conclusions based on the data. How one chooses to make comparisons is a matter of choice. We have chosen to analyze the composite system first. Next, we choose to identify opposing individual experience and compare them. Finally, we choose to treat the system as a theoretical model that can be applied to other situations and make predictions based on the model.

- Composite System
  - Brief tour through the system.
  - Describe overall placement of the affinities in the systems. Describe links, building the model from left to right. Give examples (you can put theoretical quotes directly onto your SID) of each link.
  - Highlight and *name* any feedback loops. Give an example, in the manner just above, of how each loop works; in particular, how it can *implode* or go negative. Describe way(s) to escape from a negative feedback loop.
  - Zoom out by substituting the feedback loop names for the affinities comprising the loops, working from right (outcomes) to left (drivers).

- *Exercise the model* by presuming some given states or conditions of the drivers and then examining what the expected results would be (prospective scenario). Then, do the reverse (retrospective scenario) by assuming some states or conditions of the outcomes, and then examine the model to see what conditions or states of the drivers could have produced these outcomes.
- Describe the overall timbre (hot to cold, positive to negative, bad to good, pleasant to unpleasant, lots of variation, little variation) of each affinity. Analyze the interviews based on timbre and quotes.
- Individual System
  - Discuss each affinity in the context of your interview.
  - Discuss each relationship in the context of your interview.
  - Describe links, building the model from left to right. Give examples (you can put theoretical quotes directly onto your SID) of each link.
  - Describe overall placement of the affinities in the systems.
  - Highlight and *name* any feedback loops. Give an example, in the manner just above, of how each loop works; in particular, how it can *implode* or go negative. Describe way(s) to escape from a negative feedback loop.
  - Zoom out by substituting the feedback loop names for the affinities comprising the loops, working from right (outcomes) to left (drivers).
  - *Exercise the model* by describing the individual's path through the system.
  - Describe the overall timbre (hot to cold, positive to negative, bad to good, pleasant to unpleasant, lots of variation, little variation) of each affinity. Analyze the individual interview based on timbre and quotes.
  - In the individual SID, identify the affinity, which, if its timbre becomes negative enough, will likely lead to a decision to abandon the doctoral program. (This step is particular to our case study.)
- Comparison
  - Compare and contrast drivers to outcomes, loops and the overall placement of the affinities in the systems.
  - Compare and contrast the timbre of the individual's affinities to that of the composite.
- Predictions and Interventions
  - Describe how the system can be used outside the context of the study.
- Practical Implications
  - Present a profile (in terms of the SID) of an ABD, contrasted to the student who is likely to persist. Using your own experience, the composite mindmap, and your interview, develop a list of survival techniques for grad school.

## The Role of The Researcher

As a student of the IQA class in the summer 2010, Northcutt and McCoy again offered the data to any student who wanted to use it as their dissertation. The researcher, excited about the subject and the IQA process accepted. Northcutt and McCoy provided the researcher all protocols and documents pertaining to the study, including 85 transcripts. The transcripts had been cleaned up by students in the class but examined again to remove any additional identifying information to protect the students' privacy.

Northcutt and McCoy used interview and focus group data from early classes as the basis of class assignments. The system Northcutt and McCoy used in the class and in the Interview Protocol was the result of combined theoretical codes from a focus group and a couple early classes. The data from the entire set of interviews had not been compiled. The researcher was tasked with examining each interview. Each interview produced an Axial Code table and a Theoretical code table. Once all interviews had been coded a Combined Axial Code Table was created for each affinity. A Combined Theoretical Code Table was also developed. The researcher tallied all of the Theoretical Codes to get a total frequency for the entire set of interviews. These totals were then sent to Northcutt and McCoy who added the interview data to previous focus group data and created a new Pareto Protocol. Northcutt and McCoy then created an updated system based on new larger data set. The resulting system is the basis of this dissertation.



The write Chapter 4, the researcher developed combined tables that contained Axial and Theoretical Codes from all 85 interviews. Traditionally, Axial Codes for any one affinity would be examined and subaffinities would be created by clumping similar quotes and named. Each semester the IQA classes went through this process in writing a Chapter 4. The researcher was provided copies for the Chapter 4 Write-ups for all classes available. From the chapters the researcher extracted the subaffinities identified by each class. The list of subaffinities was sent to Northcutt and McCoy. They reconciled the subaffinity names and produced the subaffinities identified in this study. Using the subaffinity list, the researcher then examined each Axial Coded in the Combined Axial Code Tables and grouped them under the appropriate subaffinity name. The researcher then produced a Chapter 4 Affinity and Theoretical Write-up as outlined in the IQA process.

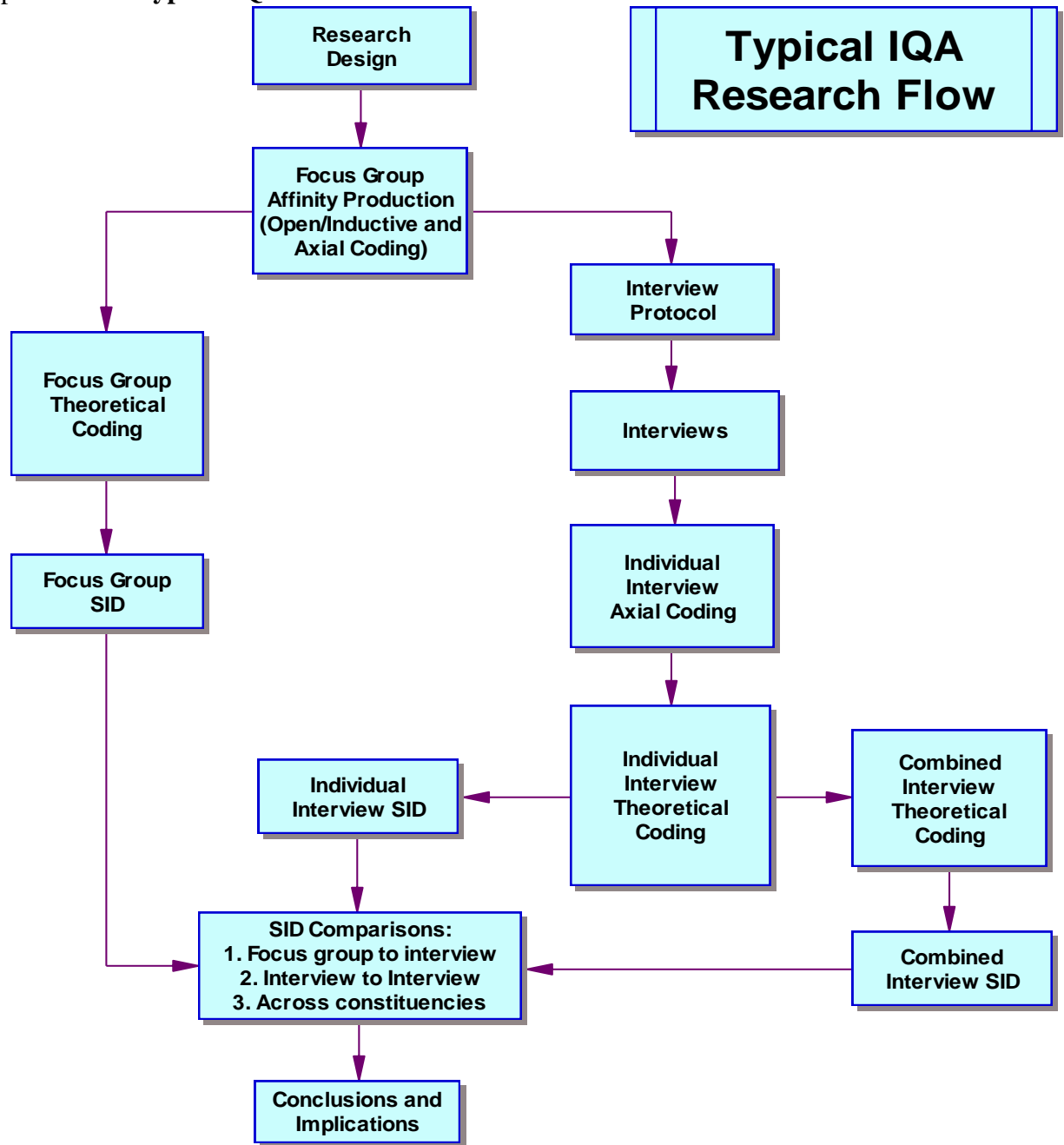
Where Northcutt and McCoy had significant amounts of raw data, the researcher was tasked with organizing the data and telling the story of the entire set or 85 students. The resulting Chapter 4 of this dissertation tells the story of the Graduate Experience, only told on a small scale by students in the IQA class.

### **Missing Data**

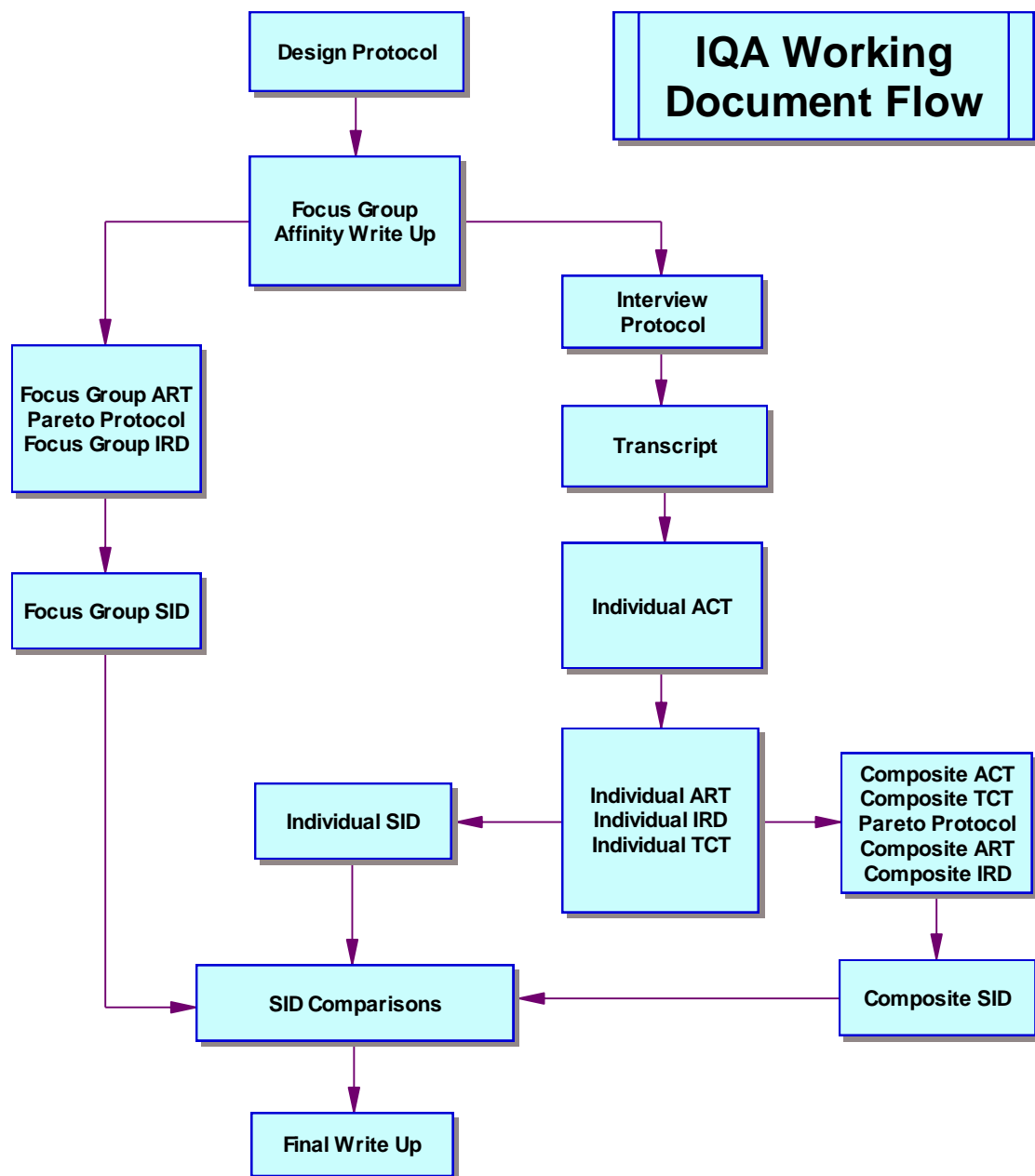
Northcutt and McCoy in the beginning did not anticipate using the Graduate Experience study in a formal report. Northcutt and McCoy designed the Graduate Experience as a class project to demonstrated the IQA process, using a practical subject that would be

interesting to students. Had they anticipated so many interviews being collected, they indicated in class that they would have captured demographic data such as, gender, academic program, nationality, race, etc, that could be used to make comparisons among the subgroups of students.

## Appendix #5 - Typical IQA Research Flow

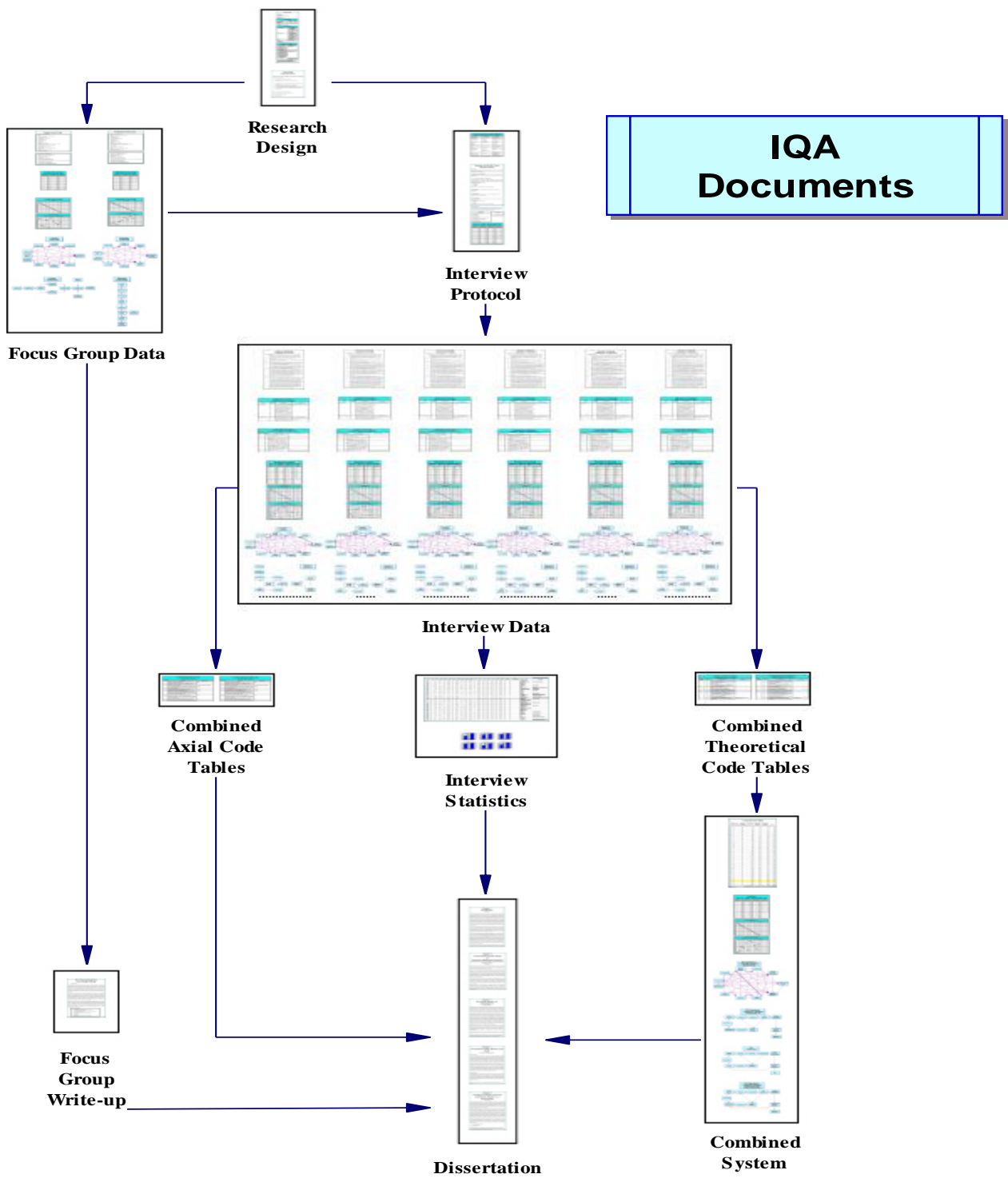


## Appendix #6 - IQA Working Document Flow



Northcutt and McCoy IQA Lecture Notes, 2011

## Appendix #7 - IQA Documents



Northcutt and McCoy, IQA Lecture Notes, 2011

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## VITA

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